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47. 1678.



SMITH'S
IRISH DIAMONDS.





The Language of Nature.

London: Chapman & Hall, 1851.



London: Chapman & Hall, 130, Strand.

1847



IRISH DIAMONDS;

OR, A

THEORY OF IRISH WIT AND BLUNDERS :

COMBINED WITH OTHER KINDRED SUBJECTS.

By JOHN SMITH,

ONE OF THE EDITORS OF THE "LIVERPOOL MERCURY;" LATE LECTURER ON
EDUCATION AND GEOGRAPHICAL SCIENCE, ETC.

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY "PHIZ."



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TO
HENRY WOOLLCOMBE, ESQ. F.S.A

PATRON OF THE PLYMOUTH INSTITUTION,
&c. &c. &c.

UNDER WHOSE FRIENDLY AUSPICES
THE SUBJECT OF THE FOLLOWING ESSAY WAS DISCUSSED
BY HIS ENLIGHTENED ASSOCIATES,
ASSEMBLED AT THE ATHENÆUM, PLYMOUTH,
ON THE 2ND APRIL, 1841,

This little Volume

IS MOST RESPECTFULLY DEDICATED BY THE AUTHOR,
NOT ONLY AS A TRIBUTE OF
SINCERE ESTEEM FOR PERSONAL WORTH AND PUBLIC SPIRIT,
BUT AS
A REMEMBRANCER OF AN AGREEABLE OCCASION,
ON WHICH PHILOSOPHY HERSELF TOOK PLEASURE IN PROVING
THAT MAN MIGHT, AT TIMES, BE BOTH
“ MERRY AND WISE.”

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INTRODUCTION.

A SHORT ONE, BECAUSE INTENDED TO BE READ.

FOR some years past the writer has occasionally noticed what is called Irish Wit, and he feels persuaded that there is a character about it to which full justice has not yet been done. That there *is* such a thing as Irish Wit, as well as Irish Bulls or Blunders, and also Irish Humour, will hardly be disputed by any one who has travelled much in these kingdoms, and who has given any attention to national peculiarities.

The old adage insists upon it that "what every body says must be true," and assuredly it is matter of every-day experience, that, when one recites in England any witty expression, alleged to have been uttered by an Irishman, the remark is almost always made, "Ah, those Irish! they

are *so* witty!" Or, if it be a bull of supposed Hibernian origin, "That's just the way! the Irish do make *such* blunders!" Or, if it be a trait of rich humour, "Really the Irish are so *very* droll!"

Now is there not something in such testimony as this? Do we hear similar remarks in reference to the English or the Scotch? If not, it may fairly be assumed that there is an admitted nationality in these characteristics, or in something that is connected with them, which as decidedly appertains to Ireland as the peculiar greenness of her fields, the tender pathos of her own undoubted music, or the generous warm-heartedness of her sons.

If the position thus taken be granted, there will appear a reasonable excuse for the present attempt to originate for consideration (and perhaps to establish) something like an analysis or classification of a part, and, if possible, *a theory* on the main portion, of the whole subject: a subject, the discussion of which, at the writer's suggestion, has frequently engaged the attention of his literary friends in private, and occasionally, also, in public; and which, propounded in this unpretending form, will not, he hopes, be unacceptable to the lovers

of rational amusement, and may, indeed, be welcome to numbers who admire the intellectual vivacity and good nature so generally observable in Ireland.

That the subject is chiefly of an amusing, nay, even a mirthful character, cannot, the writer thinks, be any matter of objection to it. It has afforded him much harmless pleasure in the intervals of arduous occupation in various parts of the kingdom, as a public lecturer on education : nor will it be any objection with those who know, and who dare avow, that cheerfulness is an excellent medicine ; and who remember that it was a wise man who said, " There is a time to laugh." But there will be instruction within its compass, too, if justice be done to it ; and of one thing the writer assures himself at the outset, in favour of the effort, namely, that it cannot be a task unworthy of a pardonable ambition, to attempt a survey of the whole of a subject, when, if we look back to the literature of forty years ago, we find that a single portion of that subject was deemed deserving of the pains-taking attention of such authors as Mr. and Miss Edgeworth, and of such critics as the writers of the " Edinburgh Review."

It is precisely because the writer found, on

referring to their work, that Mr. and Miss Edgeworth did not carry their speculations far enough *to hit the mark* ; and because the Edinburgh Reviewers, in noticing that production—the celebrated “ Essay on Irish Bulls ” — gave some admirable provocatives to inquiry, that he has been led to write out what has occurred to his own observation, both in current and recorded incidents, bearing on the question ; and to submit to the public some ideas respecting Irish Wit and its kindred subjects, different, probably, from any that have yet appeared in print.

But the work will be faulty, as some may deem ; and he will at once make plenary confession of what he knows will appear to be its faults. For one thing, he will *comment* on many of the anecdotes he shall recite. This, it may be said, will resemble the prudential conduct of the painter, who, fearful of spectators falling into mistakes respecting his artistical performances, inscribed them with the significant information, “ This is a lion,” “ This is a horse,” &c. &c. The fact, however, is, that he has a theory to advance and to support, and he must, therefore, take the liberty of pointing out, and explaining, and clearing up, his views as best he may. Were

he merely forming a collection of mirthful anecdotes (an occupation which would have few charms for him, either as matter of taste or of business), he should be content to present them, saying, with Montaigne, "Here is a nosegay of sweet flowers, with little of my own about them but the string which ties them;" and he would leave them to produce their intended excitement. But having a specific object to gain, he must exercise his prerogative in imitating the explicit painter of lions and horses; and if, in stopping at an Irish story to say "This is not a lion, nor a horse, but a *bull*," he should happen to contend that he was following that example zoologically, he might plead a precedent; namely, that of the committee of the ——— shire Agricultural Society, in the Southwest of England, who, when Mr. and Miss Edgeworth's "Essay on Irish Bulls" was first advertised, directed their secretary "to obtain two copies of the work forthwith, it being important that the farmers connected with the institution should possess the best information respecting the cattle of the sister kingdom."

And another apparent fault will consist in this circumstance, that the writer will not copy, but freely *recite*, in his own way (attaching such names

of persons and places as may best suit) the anecdotes used in illustration of the arguments. In many cases memory might not readily serve to redirect him to works wherein, years ago, he met with some stories now revived, and of which at the time he had no anticipation of ever wanting a transcript; and in other instances, where copies might readily be found, they are not unfrequently clothed in a coarseness of style not at all suited to polite society, nor in any degree essential to the inherent wit which is their only merit. Hence he will paraphrase and appropriate whatever he deems best; and even if he should describe some incidents as Irish, which may be traceable as apparently originating in other countries, it will be because they are either doubtful in that respect after all, or have been so completely *adopted* by the Irish as to constitute ingredients in proof of the existence of a curious prevailing national habit, on which he has much to say, and on which, in fact, his theory mainly rests.

But a third fault must be confessed, if fault it be. He will quote stories *old* as well as stories new, and regard the former as being *quite as good* as the latter. As a lawyer might say, "To prove the case upon which I am about to address the

court, I shall call witnesses old as Parr and Jenkins, or even as Tairville of Shetland: nay, the immortal Joseph Miller, Esq. himself shall be subpœnaed." Or as a general might say, "To win the field before me I shall avail myself of the veteran troops, depend upon it. Nor shall I be fastidious as to the uniform, or, indeed, the names of the best soldiers; and if amongst their present companions be found a goodly number that are new to fame, I shall rejoice if they only prove by their efficiency that they have been well chosen for the service."

The reader will admit, that the more ancient the proofs, in support of a theory only recently advanced, the better, because they cannot be regarded as "got up" for the occasion.

If, after this confession and this reasoning, the critics should take the liberty of giving the writer better versions of the stories, or of stating facts which, had he known or remembered them, might have served to improve this Essay, more especially if such means of emendation should be capable of strengthening his particular views of the subject of Irish wit—let the said critics take notice that he will have good revenge; for in a future edition (there are sure to be future editions!) he

will enlist their best forces into his service, and publicly acknowledge the power he has derived from their ranks !

Junius, in one of his memorable letters, says —
“ That your majesty may long live to reign over a free people is the second wish of my heart ; the first is, that the people may be free ! ”

The writer of this Essay would, in like manner, say, “ That his theory may be established, after affording some agreeable reading and discussion, is the second wish he entertains respecting his work : the first is, that it may furnish matter for such agreeable reading and discussion.” To which he will *only* add the hope that “ SMITH’S IRISH DIAMONDS ” may be even more celebrated than “ EDGEWORTH’S ESSAY ON IRISH BULLS ; ” and assuredly the *modesty* of this aspiration cannot possibly offend any one, except such as can find a fault where there is none.

Liverpool, 1846.

CHAPTER I.

THE ENGLISH, THE SCOTCH, AND THE IRISH.

It will be right in the outset, in order to clear the ground for our principal subjects, to notice some points of character in which the humbler classes of the native residents of the three kingdoms differ from each other. We need not enter into any comparative estimate of the moral worth, the bravery, and industry of the people of each country. The history of the whole world teems with honourable testimony with regard to them. They belong not to our immediate subject ; yet there is something affecting the masses of the people which *does* belong to it, namely, their intellectual condition, in which there will be observable some points of comparison important to our inquiry into Irish peculiarities. And here I would beg at once to be understood, that in comparing one people with another in any particular,

it is the labouring classes or peasantry—those numerous beings every day met with in the highways and by-ways of life, that I systematically speak of. The tendencies of a polished education are found greatly to lessen or subdue the distinctive marks, the *alto rilievo*, of national character, especially in the case of persons who possess superior station and the means of travelling; and, therefore, it is to the humbly located millions we must resort for the broader evidences, the lights and shadows of the peculiarities which demand attention.

Looking, then, at the populace of the three kingdoms (or rather queendoms), it may easily be perceived that there is a considerable difference amongst them with respect to TEMPERAMENT. The Irish are gay, ardent, and impetuous; the Scotch are comparatively cool, steady, and cautious; the English are, perhaps, a fair average between the two.

I remember it was not inelegantly observed by a friend of mine, that an Englishman thinks and speaks; a Scotchman thinks twice before he speaks; and an Irishman speaks before he thinks. A lady present added, "A Scotchman thinks with his head: an Irishman with his heart."

This allusion to impulse operating more rapidly than deliberation, is akin to Miss Edgeworth's remark, that an Irishman may err with his head, never with his heart: the truth, however, being, that he *obeys* his heart, not always waiting for the dictates of his head.

Some years ago there was a caricature, very graphically portraying these grades of difference in the ardour of the three nations. An Englishman, an Irishman, and a Scotchman were represented as looking through a confectioner's window at a beautiful young woman serving in the shop.

"Oh!" exclaims Mr. Patrick, "do let us be after spending a half-crown with the dear craytur, that we may look at her convaniently, and have a bit of chat with her."

"You extravagant dog!" says Mr. George, "I am sure one half the money will do quite as well. But let us go in by all means; she's a charming girl."

"Ah, wait a wee!" interposed Mr. Andrew; "dinna ye ken it'll serve oor purpose equally weell just to ask the bonny lassie to gie us twa sixpences for a shilling, and inquire, Where's Mr. Thompson's hoose, and sic like?"

We're no hungry, and may as weel save the siller."

And there is the old story of the experiment made in London by two friends, who spoke to every labourer they met between St. Giles's and Holborn Hill, until they had found one belonging to each of the three countries; and to each, but separately, they put the question, "What would you take to stand on the top of the Monument all night with only your night-clothes on?" The Englishman, in a straightforward way, replied at once, "Five pounds;" the Scotchman cautiously asked, "What will ye gie?" and the Irishman, off-hand, exclaimed, "Sure, I'd be after taking a bad cowl'd."

Here, again, are broad characteristics of temperament, and one glimpse of humour too.

Climate has, no doubt, its influence in such matters, and the observations which have been made on the differences perceptible in other countries, seem remarkably sustained by the geographical position of our own lands.

Scotland and England, by their other titles of North and South Britain, tell their own story of temperature even on the map; whilst Ireland, though in the same latitude as England, pos-

sesses a warmer climate, owing to her greater distance from the bleak continent of Northern Europe on the east, and her greater accessibility to the mild zephyrs of the Atlantic on the west. As one consequence of her position, "the kindly fruits of the earth," as is well known, are ready for use earlier in Ireland by about a fortnight, every spring and summer, than they are in England.

It has even been suggested for the observation of medical men and other physiologists, whether, *cæteris paribus*, the pulse of the Irish may not be a beat or two quicker, on the average, than that of the English and Scotch, owing to their more ardent or more mercurial temperament!

In affecting national characteristics, however, Nature herself has a much less appreciable influence than that "*second nature*" called habit, which, though frequently arising from causes too minute to enable us to trace any thing of its origin, yet has power to give very distinguishing features to masses of mankind, and render their peculiarities obvious to the most careless looker-on. Then education supervenes, as the THIRD nature (whenever it is not, as it ought to be, the

SECOND, for *habit ought to be the result of education*); and this modifies, controls, and improves all the previous elements of character. It has had but little influence, however, hitherto, compared with what it is destined to have; but, taking things as they are, and repeating the opinion that, with regard to temperament, the English exhibit something like an average between the Scotch and the Irish, I am bound to confess that the English are inferior to the Scotch in common education, including a knowledge of words and useful facts; and inferior to the Irish in habitual vivacity, or what may be termed *wakefulness of mind*, though they are superior in some other things.

No one can exclaim with more sincere emphasis than I can, "England! with all thy faults, I love thee still!" and, therefore, it is mortifying to have to admit that the humbler classes of my countrymen are behind their neighbours in any one thing. But such is, undoubtedly, the fact. Thousands upon thousands of them, in almost every district, are too ignorant of the very simplest truths, or too indolent of mind, either to obtain education for themselves by the slightest effort at self-improvement, or to accept it for

themselves or their children when offered by the benevolent; and there are other thousands upon thousands, in little better condition, though they have even received a modicum of what is mis-called education in places mis-called schools.*

Of course there are *some* very excellent schools for the poor. I have visited several such; but these form the exception, not the rule, if we take into account the rural districts as well as the towns: for, in most instances, the children have

* It is a fact, that when the kind-hearted gentry of a particular neighbourhood in England had erected a school and provided teachers they called at the dwellings of the poor all around, informing them that on such a day their children, of such an age, might begin to go to school and receive an education free of charge. "And how much will you give us a-week if we send 'em?" was the question more than once asked by the poor parents, who had probably been long counting the hours for their children becoming ready for *work*—not for school; and it is a question deserving of serious consideration, whether the law ought not to tell parents that information is as essential for the mind as food for the body, and that they shall have no profit from the labour of their children till they have secured for them, by any proper means they choose, the common elements of a useful education—a fact to be proved by the measure of actual *attainment*, and not by a mere certificate of attendance for a certain time at school. (This note was written early in the year 1843.)

only been taught to *say*, and, accordingly, have *said* (as they do in their prayers) words of which they know not the meaning, and have “parroted” about things respecting which they are left in profound ignorance. These children, the “to-morrow of society,” who, though young to-day, are to be the men and women of the empire in a very few years, have been left completely in the dark concerning the most useful facts in every-day life; they have learnt nothing of the multitudes of visible objects around them, or of the most valuable principles practically connected with honourable industry, or healthful bodily exercises, or mechanical powers, or natural aids to handicrafts, or personal cleanliness, or truthfulness and integrity on all points, or punctuality, or self-denial in abstaining from tempting wrong, or duty in serving a parent or a playmate, or tenderness to the inferior animals, or many, many other practical virtues and intelligences.

No! They have duly “said” what they were ordered to “say,” and that is all; and they have left school in one particular worse than they entered it—*they have got the notion they are scholars*: whilst, to all intents and purposes of real life, they are destitute of information on the

subjects which would best fit them for becoming active, useful, rational apprentices, servants, and citizens ; aware of their own best interests, and alive to their real duties to God and man. In short, they have not been morally and intellectually awakened. Hence the stupidity (no milder term will express the mental drowsiness) which prevails amongst the English peasantry, as compared with the Scotch or the Irish.

I may safely appeal to any English gentleman, whose experience is extensive, whether he does not find a humiliating difference in the replies which he receives to any twenty ordinary questions addressed to as many different country persons in the three kingdoms. In England he will *sometimes* obtain an intelligent answer ; this, again, is the exception : but he will much oftener meet with a languid "What do you say ?" or, "I don't know ;" or, "I can't tell you ;" or, "I never noticed, I'm sure." This last is a very common and very provoking reply, which reminds me of something I have elsewhere said on the important subject of "Eyes and no Eyes," and which I will here quote.

"Instance after instance continually occurs to me in various parts of England, in which I have

made inquiries of persons who ought to be able promptly to answer them, but who know nothing of facts existing daily in their very *sight*, that is, if their *mental* eyes were open. The other day I asked a resident on the banks of a river what the name of the river was ; but the only information I could obtain was that it was called ‘ the River.’ I asked a cottager, living close to the brink, which way the river ran. (At the moment no stream was visible, though it generally flows with sufficient rapidity to indicate its course.) But the good body ‘ *had never noticed which way it ran !*’ Thousands of both old and young are in this condition, with the precious mind asleep ! This ought not to be. It is as easy to excite the intellectual faculties as the limbs to useful, wholesome, improving action ; and we know that the used key is always bright !” *

Since the above was written, I one day inquired of the keeper of a toll-bar in the West of England whether a prominent object which I pointed out on a hill in the distance, from the front of his cottage, was a particular fort which I named (it happened to be the said fort) ; but he

* From the eighth edition of the author’s “ Key to Pleasant Exercises in Reading,” &c.

replied, "he really did not know what it was," though he was living constantly in sight of the important object !

And, still more recently, seeing a very singular name upon a sign-board at the corner of a street in the East of England, I applied to a young man belonging to the next house to that corner, and daily employed there, for some information respecting the name. He did not know. Did he know the person ? No. But had he not seen the sign on the wall within five yards of his head ? No ; he had never noticed it !

These are but a few specimens out of very many which would recur to recollection if I chose to add to the number ; but there is another manifestation of ignorance, frequently met with in parties who are more "alive" than those already mentioned, but whose education is wretchedly deficient with respect to words.

I remember a journeyman butcher one day relating to a professional brother of mine the details of a sharp competition there had been between the workmen of two neighbouring establishments, as to which set of men should accomplish, in the shortest time, the slaughtering of a beast, and the placing of its several parts in due

order for sale in the shambles. The narrator and his friends had won the triumph, and he said, on concluding his story, "So you'll put it in the paper, if you please, and put summut at top to make folk read it,—*pedestrianism*, I think they call it."

And I was present at the quarter-sessions held in Lancashire some years ago, when Mr. Sergeant Cross was a resident barrister in that county. The jury, having consulted and agreed upon a verdict, were addressed by the Clerk of the Peace,—

"How say you, gentlemen of the jury, do you find for the plaintiff, or the defendant?"

"What say'n yo? I dunnot understand," said the foreman.

"Why, as you have decided, all I wish to know is whether your verdict is for the plaintiff, or the defendant?"

In a manner full of evident embarrassment, the foreman replied,—

"Whoy, I raly dunnot know; but we're for him as Mester Cross is for."

This good man was, doubtless, qualified (what a word! "*qualified*!") by a certain breadth of land to be a juror; but it has by no means yet

been settled how many acres constitute a wise-acre. Surely a little education would be no unimportant ingredient in the "qualification" for such an office.

But mark the sleepiness of mind evidenced in the following fact. A friend of mine was in a grocer's shop, when a decent-looking country-woman, coming in, inquired,—

"How do you sell your sixpenny sugar a pound?"

The man smiled, and said, "Why, sixpence a pound, of course."

"Oh, well! I'll tak hafe a-pound!"

When it was handed to her, she gravely asked, "And how much will it be?"

Surely the schoolmaster *was* abroad here! for it appeared, on inquiry, that this good woman was quite as well informed as the average of her immediate neighbours. The same tradesman is a chemist as well as a grocer, and he states that there prevails such extraordinary ignorance amongst the poor around, that he is continually pestered with applications for oil of vipers, and oil of bricks! and oil of all sorts of nonsense, for the cure of different ailments. Would it not be well that the resident clergymen in each parish

should make themselves still more useful than they are, by affording their flocks some general common-sense notions in such matters as these, to protect them from gross mistakes and impositions? It might be done in conversation.

A worthy English yeoman once evinced a degree of ignorance that was profitable to his spiritual pastor. The reverend gentleman, in concluding a sermon on some doctrinal point, stated that such and such were his own views on the subject, and he had no doubt of their scriptural correctness; yet he must admit that other opinions prevailed, and certainly the commentators did not agree with him. On the following day, one of his parishioners (the yeoman I have mentioned) made a visit to the parsonage, followed by a stout fellow, bearing on his shoulders a well-filled sack; and having obtained audience of the clergyman, he kindly said,—

“Ser, yo tow’d us yisterday, i’ yore sarmon, th’ common ’tatoes didn’t agree wi’ yo; so I’ve browt a seck o’ th’ best Ormskirk sets, o’ my own growin’, and I *know* they’re *good uns*: so I hope yo’ll accept on um.”

Now, what harm would a knowledge of words, even to their very roots, have done to all these

parties, if conferred upon them in their youth ? It will not be denied that children of all classes ought to be able *to speak*, to express their thoughts, and to carry a message ; and, of course, that they ought to be taught *words*—the words of their own language. And, if so, I assert that the words may be as readily, as quickly, as pleasantly, learnt *with* their derivations as without them : nay, more readily, more quickly, more pleasantly ; so much so as to render the school-room a place of the most willing resort, and to engage the best feelings of children in favour of delightful daily exercises in what is thereby rendered really intelligible English.*

I cannot willingly dismiss this portion of my subject, without expressing the ardent hope that my enlightened and benevolent countrymen will, in future, more strenuously endeavour to render whatever *amount* of education they may choose to promote among the people, effective and mind-wakening as *far* as it goes. This is, surely, desirable and *due* to our country ; for, search where you will,—travel, if you please, to the

* The writer has carried this into effect in thousands of families and schools. See List of Helps to Education, at the end of this volume.

“farthest verge of the green earth,” and you shall nowhere find a worthier man than “the stout Englishman in all his rough;” and this ought to be an irresistible reason for the effort being yet made to render his head equal to his heart. The precious diamond is unquestionably there; but *what is a diamond unless the light shines upon it?*

The well-informed Englishman exhibits mental power and skill which, ingeniously and industriously applied to useful purposes, have astonished the world; and it is, therefore, only the more grievous that the instances of ignorance I have adduced are only ordinary and faithful specimens of what too commonly prevails throughout the land.

But in Scotland, my own experience and that of others will justify the assertion that the mass of the people are far better informed, with respect to both words and things. The parochial schools have for ages dispensed unspeakable advantages to the children of the poor; though to obtain those advantages the young creatures in many cases have had to trudge from their homes, over hills and dales, and through glens and streams, for two, three, and even four miles, daily, for

years, in order to reach the school. And though there are exceptions to the rule as to others, the teacher, generally, has been really *qualified* to teach. He has had education sufficient to enable him to give instruction respecting a thousand useful things in the real business of life; and although the *amount* of education might not be great, it was of a good quality. This could be truly said, even before that mighty impulse to education, originating in the Edinburgh Sessional School, began to excite and enlighten the general mind. How much is the assertion strengthened now!

I shall never forget the agreeable impression I received from the varied information afforded me by clear-headed men and women (many of them barefooted) in the rural districts of the Highlands, whether my inquiries related to the grand objects of nature around me, the way I was travelling, or the condition of the people in different districts. Indeed, one may discover the superiority of the Scotch in this respect by the merest attention to what is passing, without taking the pains of making actual inquiries. Even in directing a wayfarer in reference to the positions of places in town or country, their habitual allusions to the

points of the compass, such a place being described as lying east, another south, &c., attest their possession of much useful knowledge.

Passing up the Clyde one day in a steam-boat, I sat near two fustian-clad youngsters who were lounging about the deck. They were evidently factory boys, of about eleven and twelve years of age, returning to Glasgow after a holiday ramble. They seemed very much tired, and one of them, laying himself down on a form, closed his eyes. "Are ye gaen to sleep?" inquired his companion. "Oh, no!" was the reply; "I'm just antecipating the plaisure we shall have, the night, with Mrs. Macpherson classifying oor botanical specimens for us." This I immediately perceived had reference to an object lying near them, a tin case crammed full of wild plants and flowers, which I soon learned the lads had been gathering on the "banks and braes" of Loch Lomond! And I could not help thinking what a good stock of words, and of ideas too, had been indicated even by expressions couched in all the ease of their common dialect.

On another occasion I was with a party of friends in the romantic region of Loch Vennachar, when we descried a mountain top, the form of

which we did not recognise at the moment, so that we could not salute it by name, as was our custom. I therefore stopped the first wayfarer we met (a countryman driving a little Highland cart), and, pointing to the mountain, I begged to know the name of it. "Ben Ledi," said he (pronouncing it Ben Laidee) ; and he was passing forward, but I detained him by the further question, "Is Ledi a Gaelic word, of which you can give me an English meaning?"

"No, sir," said he: "the word *Ledi* is no Gaelic of a'. *Ben*, you are aware, signifies hill, or mountain, and there is a tradeetion amongst us, that, previous to the introduction o' Christianity into these islands (Good language for a carter, thought I), the mountain was a sacred spot with the Druids. Indeed," he continued, "I believe there are remains yet visible of a cromlech or altar on the summit, where, it is said, releegious festivals or anniversaries were held; on which accoont it was called *Ben le Dieu*,—the holy hill, or God hill; and this, it is supposed, has been graudually shortened to Ben Ledi."

Here was an answer to a casual question! Imagine the zest with which I listened to every word of this charming bit of local etymology from

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a Highland peasant ; and how I thanked the gude fellow for his information ; which, whether historically or philologically tenable or not, seems interesting as matter of tradition, and furnishes another proof of the superior intelligence of our North Britons. I could go on augmenting my evidence on the subject, but I deem it unnecessary. Let the superiority be admitted, however, and still I say the English may lessen this distinction, and, indeed, ultimately annihilate it, by becoming alive to improvement, and by *following till they overtake !*—a task of some difficulty, undoubtedly, but more easy to accomplish in the case of two nations than in that of two individuals, one of whom has already had the start : for it must be remembered that while individuals die off, nations, as such, do not ; yet every child and every successive generation has to commence its course of tuition with the mind still at *zero* with respect to knowledge.

But now for another question. In what characteristic do the *Irish* excel ? Why, in quickness, vivacity, or wakefulness of mind ; and in this they appear to me to surpass both the English and the Scotch.

Facts tending to establish the correctness of

this opinion will be found, abundant in number and efficient in strength, in the course of the present work, not only in the chapters wherein Irish wit, *per se*, is displayed, but in the others.

CHAPTER II.

DEFINITIONS OF WIT AND BLUNDER.

THE "Edinburgh Review," in an article (ascribed to that celebrated wit the late Rev. Sydney Smith,) criticising Mr. and Miss Edgeworth's "Essay on Irish Bulls," gives us definitions of wit and blunder which are very admirable, and which I am glad to adopt, as serving my purpose very acceptably.

The writer says ("Edinburgh Review," vol. ii. July 1803), "Though the question is not a very easy one (to solve), we shall venture to say that a bull is an apparent congruity and real incongruity suddenly discovered." If I might paraphrase this definition, I should say that in a bull we have first an apparent agreement or consistency of parts, followed, however, by the sudden discovery of their ludicrous disagreement.

"And if this account of bulls," says the Re-

viewer, "be just, they are the very reverse of wit; for, as wit discovers *real* relations that are *not apparent*, bulls admit *apparent* relations that are *not real*. The pleasure arising from wit proceeds from our surprise at suddenly discovering two things to be similar in which we suspected no similarity. The pleasure arising from bulls proceeds from our discovering two things to be dissimilar in which a resemblance might have been suspected."

The Reviewer then proceeds to give two appropriate anecdotes, excellently illustrating the truth of both the definitions he has advanced. First, that of wit.

"Louis XIV. being extremely harassed by the repeated solicitations of a veteran officer for promotion, said one day loud enough to be heard, 'That gentleman is the most troublesome officer I have in my service.' 'That is precisely the charge,' said the old man, 'which your majesty's enemies bring against me.'"

Secondly, for the bull. "An Irish gentleman was writing a letter in a coffee-house, and perceiving that an Irishman stationed behind him was overlooking him, he continued writing, 'I would say more, but an impudent tall Irishman is reading over my shoulder every word I write.'

‘ You lie, you scoundrel !’ said the self-convicted Hibernian.”

Upon these examples the Reviewer truly observes :—

“ The pleasure derived from the first of these stories proceeds from the discovery of the relation that subsists between the *object* the officer had in view and his own ready assent to an *observation* so unfriendly to that end.

“ In the first rapid glance which the mind throws upon his words, he appears by his acquiescence to be pleading against himself. There seems to be no relation between what he says and what he wishes to effect by speaking.

“ In the second story the pleasure is decidedly the reverse. The lie given was *apparently* the readiest means of proving his innocence, and *really* the most effectual way of establishing his guilt. There seems for a moment to be a strong relation between the means and the object, while, in fact, no irrelation can be so complete.”

Giving two other instances, the Reviewer proceeds :—

“ What connexion is there between pelting stones at monkeys and gathering cocoa-nuts from lofty trees ? Apparently none. But monkeys

sit upon cocoa-nut trees : monkeys are imitative animals ; and if you pelt a monkey with a stone he pelts you with a cocoa-nut in return. This scheme of gathering cocoa-nuts is very witty, and would be more so if it did not appear useful ; for the idea of utility is always inimical to the idea of wit. There appears, on the contrary, to be some relation between the revenge of the Irish rebels against a banker and the means which they took to gratify it, by burning all his notes wherever they found them ; whereas, they could not have rendered him a greater service. In both these cases of bulls—the one verbal, the other practical—there is an *apparent* congruity and a *real* incongruity of ideas. In both the cases of wit there is an *apparent* incongruity and a *real* relation. It is clear that a bull cannot depend upon mere incongruity alone ; for if a man were to say he would ride to London upon a cocked hat, or that he would cut his throat with a pound of pickled salmon, this, though completely incongruous, would not be to make bulls but to talk nonsense. The stronger the apparent connexion, and the more complete the real disconnexion of ideas, the greater the surprise and the better the bull. The less apparent and the more complete

the relations established by wit, the higher gratification does it afford."

This admirable argument affords us a very complete analysis of the constituents of wit in general, and Irish bulls in particular; and presents a clever antithetical distinction between their respective characteristics. A master-mind has here done good service, and has shewn its acumen by remarking on the wide difference between making bulls and talking mere nonsense. Yet the goal is not reached. We must advance still farther; we must "go ahead," as Brother Jonathan hath it, "pretty considerably," before we establish what I conceive to be the true theory of Irish wit and blunders.

CHAPTER III.

THE AUTHOR'S THEORY OF IRISH WIT
AND BLUNDERS.

LET us now inquire what it is, then, that constitutes the renowned Irish wit and the no less celebrated Irish blunders. In other words, What is it that for centuries has led to the expressions alluded to in the Introduction to this volume? "Ah, those Irish! they are *so* witty!" and "That's just the way! the Irish do make *such* blunders!" Has the world been mistaken all the time—itself committing a huge blunder on the subject? No. There *is* what I conceive to be Irish wit, there is what I conceive to be Irish blunder, peculiarly so; at least peculiar to such a degree that no other nation can lay claim to a reputation similar to that which Ireland has won for wit and blunder, BOTH of which I hope to prove arise from ONE and the SAME SOURCE.

The Edinburgh Reviewers, in their treatment of the subject, make considerable advances towards the theory I have adopted. At one moment I thought they would reach it: but they did not. Every step they took was right; but I must go further than they, and endeavour to be first at the goal.

And here I must state in what it is that I totally differ from Mr. and Miss Edgeworth, with whom, in other branches of the subject, it will be found I shall cordially agree.

It is evident that the task which those deservedly popular writers assigned to themselves in their "Essay," was to prove that Ireland was not at all chargeable with the facetious crime of making bulls, *any more* than other nations; and the industry and success with which they discover and quote parallels to reputed Irish bulls, recorded in countless treasures of standard literature of all countries, is highly creditable to their zeal and vast intelligence. The efforts made to establish their case are numerous and vigorous, but they are ultimately damaged by two circumstances. First, a short-coming as to facts, because the foreign parallels only apply (with some exceptions) to the more ordinary blundering

which I shall class as belonging to all nations ; and, secondly, by some admissions as to the perpetration of bulls in Ireland, which admissions are inconsistent with and, indeed, at direct variance with their defence of that country from the charge of such perpetrations. It is not a little curious to find, that after long-sustained and most diligent pleading, throughout the far greater part of the " Essay," in denial of the charge altogether, such admissions as these are made :—

" The phlegmatic temper of the English secures them from making bulls. The propensity to this species of blunder exists in minds of a totally different cast : in those who are quick and enthusiastic, who are confounded by the rapidity and force with which undisciplined multitudes of ideas crowd for utterance."

" Those who use figurative language are disposed to make bulls. The Irish use figurative language ; therefore the Irish are disposed to make bulls."

I will not stop to comment on these admissions, nor on the discrepancies between them and the whole tenor of Mr. and Miss Edgeworth's argument.

It cannot be successfully denied, that "the Irish

are disposed to make bulls ;" their bulls are not, however, the common race of blunders so constantly, so ridiculously assigned to them by the unthinking.

I will now state my own view of the subject, which is, that we must look beyond the two causes assigned for the blunders of the Irish, namely, impetuosity and the use of figurative language. These would, undoubtedly, account for *much* in any nation ; but we must add a third ingredient before the charm is complete, and then, I think, we may proceed with advantage to examine how far it leads to the true theory, not only of genuine Irish bulls, but also of genuine Irish wit, for I contend that they have both one common origin.

The main cause for that which appears to me to be the prevailing Irish wit is the habit of the Irish people to look to the other end, if I may so express myself, of any idea that is presented to them ; a national habit of contrast ; a mental antipodean exercise ; a flight to the opposite extreme of a proposition—which, in youth, in manhood, and in age, the Irish seem to delight in. Any sudden start of intellectual antagonism, a prompt appliance of the contrary end of the

telescope of thought, is as natural to an Irish mind as the rebound of a blow, or as the inevitably left-handed reflexion from a mirror. If I were to say the Irish were prone to sudden antithesis, this would partly express my meaning, but antithesis is not sufficiently graphic, neither is antimetathesis. The oxymoron, or rhetorical paradox, is nearer; under which form of proposition Cato used to say of Scipio Africanus, "He was never less at leisure than when at leisure, nor less alone than when alone:" yet this is too straightforward, too ordinary, too obvious a contradiction of terms.

There is a more witty specimen of this figure, in which it is said,—

An Englishman is never happy but when he is miserable;

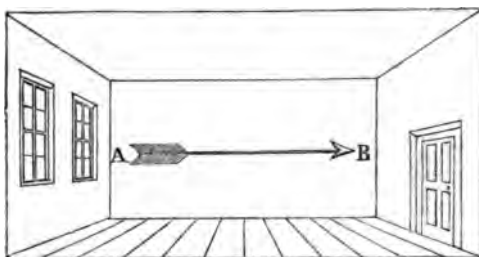
A Scotchman is never at home but when he is abroad;

An Irishman is never at peace but when he is fighting.

This is nearer the mark; but I must, if possible, be more explicit still. One neighbour may live directly *opposite* to another in a straight street; but it is more like the *oppositeness* I would describe, when, at four street ends, each corner-house is considered in reference to the one *diago-*

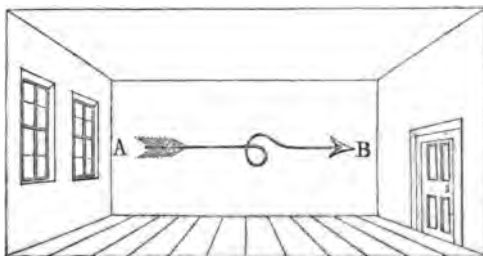
nally opposite. But there is something still more definite in opposition even than this.

I may sketch a figure representing a question, A, from the impulse of which the arrow of thought flies to the answer, B, say in an imaginary room thus :—



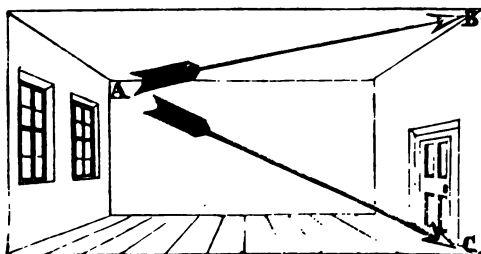
In this case it is *direct*, and represents the English style of reply to a question, when, being answered by a competent person, it is prompt and straightforward.

If I sketch another figure, thus :—



We have here an answer equally useful and distinct, but the arrow has turned round during its flight, as if to look about it, to be aware of all the circumstances, and to be cautiously accurate ; and this is the Scotch style of reply or observation.

But I will try a third sketch :—



And in this we have the flight of an Irish answer. From the inner corner A, the arrow flies to one of the most diagonal opposites which presents itself on the instant ; either at B, which is on the same level, and where it is almost sure to strike out a flash of wit ; or at C, which is on a *different level*, and therefore often leads to an amusing blunder.

There is generally no deliberation in the matter,—the antipodean habit prompts to an instant

sally, and it is always doubtful at A what the result will be.

I cannot, of course, account for the origin, or continued existence of the habit here spoken of, as prevailing among the Irish, any more than I can account for Welshwomen wearing men's hats, for the Scotch terminating their Highland melodies on other than the key note ; for Brother Jonathan "guessing" and "calculating" with a nasal twang ; for Frenchmen shrugging up their shoulders to their ears in conversation ; or for the modes of living in these three kingdoms varying so much that it is said a *bon vivant*, if he would enjoy a day thoroughly, ought to breakfast in Scotland, dine in England, and spend the evening in Ireland. All nations have their peculiarities, and the flight to mental contrasts is one which distinguishes Ireland ; and although it appears to me indisputably to lead alike to witticisms and blunders, I believe the former very greatly to preponderate, and therefore I would not for a moment endeavour to deprive Erin of the ample honour of the one by the vain attempt to turn aside from her the harmless raillery she can well afford to bear for the other.

I have before observed that, at one moment,

while reading the article in the "Edinburgh Review," I expected something like this theory would have been educed by the able writer; and I may mention that I had a similar anticipation that Mr. and Miss Edgeworth would have struck upon it, when, in an advanced position of their Essay, I found the well-known anecdote which follows, and which, with singular felicity, illustrates my meaning with respect to the Irish habit of MENTAL OPPOSITES.

"When General V—— was quartered in a small town in Ireland, he and his lady were regularly besieged, whenever they got into their carriage, by an old beggar-woman, who kept her post at the door, assailing them daily with fresh importunities and fresh tales of distress. At last the lady's charity and the general's patience were nearly exhausted, but their petitioner's wit was still in its pristine vigour. One morning, at the accustomed hour, when the lady was getting into her carriage, the old woman began,—

"'Agh! my lady; success to yer ladyship, and success to yer honour's honour this morning, of all the days in the year; for sure didn't I drame last night that her ladyship gave me a pound of

tay, and that yer honour gave me a pound of tobacco?’

“‘But, my good woman,’ said the General, ‘do you not know that dreams always go by the rule of contrary?’

“‘Do they so, plase yer honour?’ rejoined the old woman; ‘then it must be yer honour that will give me the tay, and her ladyship that will give me the tobacco.’”

Here the English or Scotch mind, I have no hesitation in saying, would have taken the allusion to dreams and their contraries to signify, that as far as dreams could apply to realities, there must be expected, according to the adage, a decided negation of the request which had been urged; but the Irish are not disposed to look at *such* opposites. No; they must fly to the *compound contrariety*.

The applicant’s reply to the General’s intimation that “dreams always go by the rule of contrary,” was completely antipodean:—

“Then it must be yer honour that will give me the tay, and her ladyship that will give me the tobacco.”

And this is, indisputably, genuine wit; IRISH WIT, I call it, because in no other nation that I

have heard of is there that constant, every-day, and successful recourse to opposites—such a flying to the other end of an idea, as our Irish brethren are prone to.

Far be it from me, however, to dogmatize. I must produce many facts before a theory can be established, and if the one I propose be sound, it will, as I have ventured to premise, apply both to wit and blunder; my proofs of its doing which will, I trust, be equally convincing and entertaining.

CHAPTER IV.

GENUINE IRISH BULLS.

BEARING in remembrance the theory advanced in the preceding chapter, we will now proceed with our tests, under the two divisions of the subject, and beginning with blunders first.

What degree of influence the *atmosphere* of Ireland may have in producing blunders, my readers must be pleased to investigate for themselves; but, according to Mr. and Miss Edgeworth, the very thought of it seems to have been a stimulant to that effect. "When Sir Richard Steele was asked," say they, "how it happened that his countrymen made so many bulls, he replied, 'It is the effect of climate, sir; if an Englishman were born in Ireland he would make as many.'"

This, at all events, has the *air* of a genuine Irish blunder.

It reminds me of a gentleman who appeared to

be infected somewhat in the manner Sir Richard suggests, though he was not born in Ireland, but had only recently arrived in Dublin with many friendly introductions. The delivery of his first letter, alone, immediately led to his being invited out for four days in succession to different parties, by one of whom a carriage and livery servant were placed at his command. He experienced, indeed, in full measure, the strength and activity of Irish hospitality; and was so feasted and lionised for a fortnight, without a day's respite, and until late hours at night, that, alluding to this round of gaiety one day, he exclaimed to a companion,—

“Upon my word, if I live long here I shall die soon.”

The Irish soldier, waking one morning from a sound sleep on a floor of hard boards, felt his limbs ache to an unusual degree. Looking around, he espied a few feathers lying about where he had slept.

“Oh! I see how it is; it's them plaguy feathers sure enough. And if the likes of them few can make one's bones so sore, I pities grately the poor cratur that lies on whole beds full av 'em.”

This idea of quantity is very opposite to the ordinary one.

“What makes you so very drowsy this morning?” said a friend to an Irish neighbour.

“Why, the fact is,” said he, “I’m not at all refreshed by my night’s rest.”

“How has that happened, I wonder?” continued his friend.

“Indeed, sir, I could’nt sleep for draiming.”

Here, we may observe, that an Englishman might have taken the fact of dreaming as some evidence of sleeping, but the Irishman, of course, looked at the matter from a different point of view.

And it was a confounding of an effect upon the eye with something that was, in fact, due to the ear, which induced the blunder of poor Dennis in writing a letter to his mother.

“Why do you write in so very large a hand?” inquired a friend.

“Arrah, dear, an’ isn’t it to my poor mother I’m writing? and she is so very deaf, that I’m writing her a loud letther.”

“Is not that a thin fellow?” said an Englishman to Paddy. “I do think I never saw, in all England, a man so very thin.”

"Och!" said Paddy, with a chuckling whoop, "do you call *him* thin? why I know a man in Ireland that's as thin as two av him."

This, again, is the other end of the idea.

Murphy was going to his work early one morning, and was met by a friend, who knew that Murphy's married sister, with whom he lodged, was expected to add a unit to the population.

"Well, is there any news of your sister this morning?"

"Oh, then, indeed there is, I'm glad to tell you; and all's nicely over: thanks be for that same, any how."

"And is it a boy or a girl?"

"By the powers, now, and if I haven't forgotten to ask whether I am an uncle or an aunt."

Surely this is antipodean enough. Instead of looking at the effect of the question in reference to the child, he thinks of its bearing upon himself.

A new stove had been invented, and a gentleman soliciting orders for it was praising its comfortable and economical qualities, in the highest terms, to Mr. O'Shaughnassey, who listened with the greatest attention. As a climax to his eulogium, the interested party declared that the use

of one of the said stoves would save the purchaser one-half the quantity of fuel he at present consumed.

“Do you mane to say,” earnestly inquired Mr. O’Shaughnassey, “that one of the stoves would save half my fuel?”

“Most decidedly I do : I will answer for it.”

“Then give me your hand, my friend,” said he, delighted, “and I’ll tell you what I’ll do ; I’ll have two stoves, and save it all.”

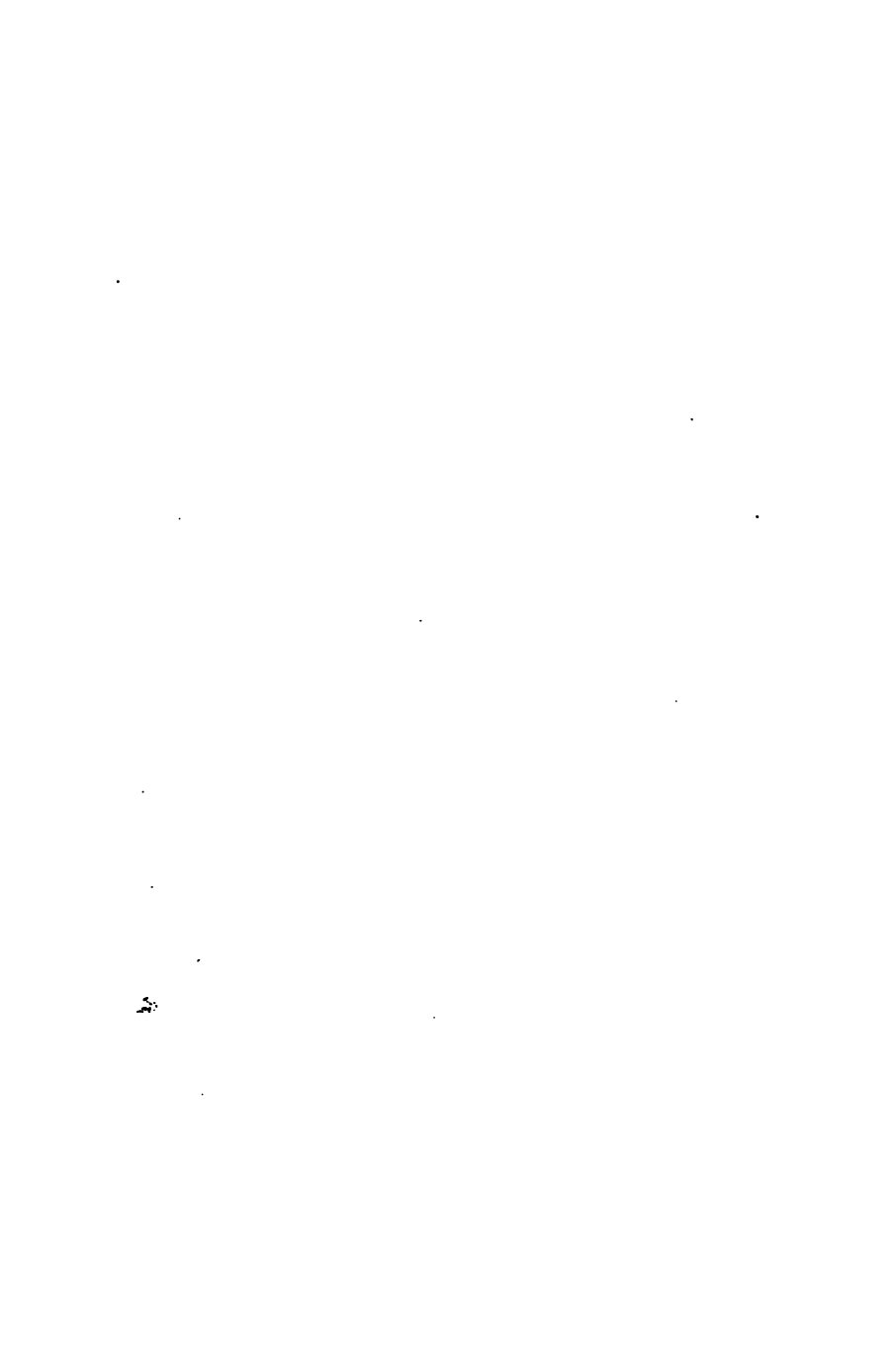
And how could his friend get over this anti-podean arithmetic ? Would not Cocker himself say, that if one stove saved half the fuel, two stoves would save it all ?

A poor Irishman, whose workshop was in a cellar, was one day clearing away some muddy accretions from the stone sill about the outside of his window-place, when a neighbour remarked that he was making the most of his space.

“Yes,” said he, “I am just wanting to let as much of the darkness out of my cellar as possible.”

An Englishman would not *thus* have explained his object.

A ship was almost under way ; it was floating towards the stream of the river, and all was





The Rope without an End. page 41

London, Chapman & Hall, 156, Strand.

anxiety to be clear away, when poor Barney was still in the boat tugging in a long line that was chiefly under water.

"Come, come," said the Captain, from the poop, "don't be all day pulling in that line; bear a hand."

"Yes, sor," said Barney, and with renewed efforts he pulled and pulled, till his back ached, and his brow was moist, and his patience almost gone.

The Captain had taken a turn on deck, and again hastily looking over, he found Barney still tugging away.

"Why, haven't you reached the end yet?" he cried out.

"No, indeed, master," replied the anxious Barney, still pulling, but looking up to appease the Captain; "and, by my soul, I've been looking for the end till I'm beginning to think it has got none. I do believe, sor, somebody's cut it aff."

Could the suggestion of such a reason for not "coming to an end" have originated with any but an Irishman? I deem it impossible.

Many other specimens under this head might be found, though they are by no means so nu-

merous as the witticisms; but they sufficiently indicate, as I think, the *character* of genuine Irish blunders. And it will be admitted that they are of an order very different indeed from the incongruities of the stupid, or of the mere talkers of nonsense. We will next proceed with some genuine witticisms, classified on the same theory; but even the contents of this short chapter will enable the reader to decide whether or not I have "hit the bull's eye."

CHAPTER V.

GENUINE IRISH WIT.

HERE we shall find ourselves in the very orchard of Paddy's good sayings; and, amidst the thick boughs which hang around us, we have only to take in our hands the gauge or test of our theory, and select the ripest and most pleasing fruit for our enjoyment.

On memorable authority, perhaps as ancient as that of Joseph Miller, Esquire, we have heard of the refusal to relieve a beggar, on the plea "We never give anything at the door:" and this was met by the ingenious invalidation of the demurrer by a change of the *locus in quo*,—"Ah, indeed! then I'll just go to the winday, if you please." But the following actually occurred in recent days. An Irish beggar-woman rapped diffidently at the door of a philanthropic gentleman of Liverpool: his sister, then keeping house for him, from whom

I had the story, attended to the knock herself, and in answer to the beseeching tones of the applicant for a "trifle of charity," she said;—

"No; go away, good woman: I never give anything at the door."

"Oh, then, ma'am," replied the poor creature, curtsying, "I'll be after stepping into the hall, if you please, ma'am;" and suiting the action to the word, she stepped over the threshold.

This tickled the lady into a suppressed laugh, and we may therefore guess what would follow. After some inquiries into particulars, there was at last a looking-up of some broken meat, an article or two of cast-off clothing, and a few pence.

"There," said the lady, "now, go your way; and as I have given you these things contrary to my rule, don't trouble *me* any more, I pray you."

"Ah! good lady, dear, don't say the likes of that: if we don't go where they *do* give us, where will we go?"

Of course the lady had furnished the best reason for a non-observance of her own injunction, especially on the part of one who could take this other-end view of the subject.

Liverpool was *famous* (!) and, indeed, is too much so still, for deep cellars, inhabited by poor

people. In one of these, at the corner of a street, a knife-grinder was pursuing his humble vocation, when a rough-looking fellow stood reading an amusing placard pasted just above the cellar-way. Slung from his shoulders, he held a couple of pails brimful of swillings, some of which slopped over into the knife-grinder's cellar, during the hearty laugh which shook the sides of the gaping reader. The disagreeable fluid trickling down, attracted the attention of the workman below, who bawled out,—

“What the plague are you about there? you fellow! you, standing out there!”

Sulkily the man replied,—

“Fellow, standing out there, indeed! why, I’ve only been slopping in a little, I suppose.”

“True,” was the retort; “but you’d a dale better come in and slop out.”

This union, by antithesis, of decency, hospitality, and good-nature, proves of what country was the knife-grinder.

An Irish sentinel on duty was so furiously assailed by a dog, that to escape inevitable damage from his powerful fangs he shot the animal. It turned out to be the property of an officer of the garrison, who severely rebuked the soldier, telling

him that he might surely have been satisfied by taking the but-end of his musket to defend himself. "And so I would have done, yer honour, had he run at me wid his tail."

In a company where it was the subject of conversation, that a wealthy gentleman of the neighbourhood intended to give 20,000*l.* with each of his daughters, on their marriage; a cool, calculating person present, said he would ingratiate himself with the gentleman, by shewing him how to save 10,000*l.*, for he would marry one of his daughters for half the proposed dowry. An Irishman took a very opposite view of the tempting prospect, for he exclaimed, "Twenty-thousand pounds do you say he'll give with aich girl? Then I'll be after taking two of 'em immediately."

Two officers of customs in a large sea-port, one of them an Irishman, the other an Englishman, were on very friendly terms. They met each other one morning, when the Irishman exclaimed;—

"I wish you had been with us at the coffee-house last night; and yet, on reflection, I don't, for there was that impudent fellow you affronted the other day, taking liberties with your name.

Nay, don't be in a passion now, for, you see, *I* was there, and I soon settled him."

"Tell me this moment," said the other, reddening up, "tell me what the vile slanderer said!"

"No, indeed, I won't. You'll be in a passion if I do; and sorry I am now I named it, as it's all over. I took your part completely, so never mind."

"The villain! I'll——"

"Yes, I know you would; but for that reason I won't tell you: if you'll only promise not to spake to him, nor meddle with him, you shall know it all; but not else."

"Well, well, I promise."

"Upon your honour?"

"Upon my honour."

"Why, you see, we happened to mention your name, when, in a most insulting way, the fellow bawled out, 'What's he? he's not fit to carry garbage to a bear!'"

"Did he say so? the impudent scoundrel, I'll——no, I mustn't, I suppose, as I've promised: but I'm glad *you* were there, my friend. What did you say?"

"Why," replied the Irishman, "of course I contradicted him in the flattest terms, and silenced

him in a minute, for I declared most confidently *that you were !*" [Capt. Marryatt adopts this story.]

It was a contrast amounting to a reflection which the impudent Irish vagrant played off upon the magistrate, who shewed no little prejudice himself at the sight of the petty offender : " Ah ! sir, I see what you are ; I see the rogue in your face."

" Indeed, yer wurship, I didn't know afore that my face was a looking-glass."

Some years ago there appeared in the shop windows a humorous print, in which the genius of contrast was vividly displayed. Two boys, one of them a native of the sod, were running a race on their respective donkeys, and the Irish boy was giving an admirable illustration of that most excellent maxim in education—"it is better to lead than to drive." His competitor was belabouring the sides of his patient but inert quadruped most unmercifully, and by dint of such impulses from the cudgel he had attained a certain speed ; but young Taigue was taking very opposite means. He had suspended at the end of his shillelagh a bunch of carrots and greens, and this irresistible temptation he held forward at the distance of a few inches from the nose of

his hungry steed. The effect need not be particularised. He was shooting rapidly ahead, and assuredly Lord Bacon himself could not have devised a more convincing proof of the superiority of the inductive method than was here presented by one who seemed to possess good common sense, though probably his knowledge of the philosophy of Bacon was limited to an occasional rasher.

"Come down, this instant," said the boatswain to a mischievous son of Erin, who had been idling in the round-top; "come down, I say, and I'll give you a good dozen, you rascal!"

"Troth, sor, and I would'nt come down if you'd give me two dozen!"

This treatment of a threat, as if it were a promise, but promise by no means alluring, is an instance of the spirit of contrast.

An ingenious mode of appearing to disparage a bed at the inn, whilst, on the contrary, a real compliment was conveyed, was adopted by a witty Irish traveller. The landlady, adorned with her best morning smile, hoped he had enjoyed a comfortable night's rest; a hope which his gay and cheerful look might well warrant.

"Oh, ma'am, you oughtn't to charge me for the bed at all, at all."

"No! Why, my good sir, what's amiss? this is the first time I ever heard a complaint respecting the bed. Whatever can there be that's wrong about it?"

"I tell ye, ma'am, you must not charge me a penny for it!"

"Oh! don't say so, good sir: what is amiss?"

"Why, ma'am, to tell you the truth, I'd no good of it at all; I never know'd I was in it."

An Irish shoemaker who had been to the city, where had he indulged himself rather too freely with the *cratur*, was returning to his village, reeling along the road from right to left, (by which he knew he was not altogether right,) when he was met by a friend, who expressed his regret that he had so far to go, so heavily laden; he would find it a long way, he feared. "Och, bless your heart, my dear sor—hic—it isn't the length of the way, at all—hic—sure, its the breadth that bothers me intirely."

Most people on seeing any one, and a labouring man especially, eating, all at once, bread, butter, and cheese, would deem the repast an extravagant one; but Phelim, accused of the wasteful practice, excused himself adroitly by his view of the subject. "It's economy, I tell ye—

raal economy. Don't you see I makes one piece of bread go as far as two? it sarves for the butter, and it sarves for the cheese too. It's quite a saving o' the loaf, my dear."

And the well-known instance of the lady desirous of making the most of her choice tap of table-beer, the merits of which her servants had discovered, is a case in point.

"Daly," said she, to her Irish butler, "what, think you, will be the best way of saving this nice beer as much as possible? It is so unusually fine and nice, that I should like it to last a good while."

"Why, madam," replied the well-fed functionary, "I raly don't think you could do better than place a barrel of good strong ale close by the side of it."

Here, again, were totally different views of the same subject.

Paddy came very late to his work one morning, for which his employer reprimanded him. In the afternoon, his master met him half-way home before the usual hour of dismissal.

"How is this, my man, and you were so late this morning?"

"Troth, sor, I'm going airly for that same

raison, because it would be too bad to be late twice in one day."

The proneness to contrast was one day evinced by an Irishman under circumstances in which presence of mind was of the utmost importance, and when ready wit was above all price. Murphy's foot had tripped against a rope on the pier-head at a moment when nobody was very near him, and he fell into the river. The instant his head emerged from the water he cried out, "Fire! fire!"—the most alarming monosyllable that can be uttered in the neighbourhood of shipping. Under water again for a second and again emerging, "Fire! fire! fire!" he screamed. One person after another caught the sound; men and boys were seen running towards the spot; boatmen pulled in the same direction; and in a few moments, by rope and by hand, Murphy was safely brought upon *terra firma*.

"But why, in the name of common-sense," said a bystander, "did you call out 'fire! fire!' when you were completely soused in the water?"

"Ah! upon my word, my good fellow," said Murphy, shaking his feathers, rubbing his wet hands, and looking blue with the cold he had suffered from the plunge, "I might have called

‘Water ! water !’ long enough before I’d have got anybody come near me to help me out.”

We have still more selections to make from so productive a field, but we may advantageously pause to introduce another chapter here, by way of parenthesis or episode, from which we shall be able to proceed to the remainder of our repast with a renewed relish.

CHAPTER VI.

A FEW ENGLISH SPECIMENS.

ALTHOUGH I claim for the people of Ireland the honour of producing the description of wit now under consideration, it would be absurd to suppose that no specimens of it, or of something strongly resembling it, are to be found in other nations. Such may be occasionally quoted from various sources : England herself furnishes some ; but still, neither she nor any other country can rival the sister kingdom in the renown of being "*so witty*," nor in the production of such countless proofs of supremacy as her long-established habits have thrown before us.

But we will take a few instances of such English wit as, more or less, resembles the Irish ; and the reader will perceive that its success, its point, and brilliancy are remarkably correspondent with the

nearness of its approach to the standard we have set up.

A young man, whose self-esteem appeared to be more fully developed than his conscientiousness, offered a very inadequate price for some property he was desirous of possessing ; and having waited a few days without receiving any reply from the owner, he called upon him for a decision, and, with much self-complacency, put the question,—

“ Pray, sir, do you entertain my proposition ? ”

“ No, sir,” was the reply ; “ but your proposition entertains me.”

The household furniture of an English barrister, then recently deceased, was being sold, in a country town, when one neighbour remarked to another that the stock of goods and chattels appeared to be extremely scanty, considering the rank of the lawyer, their late owner. “ It is so,” was the reply ; “ but the fact is, he had very few causes, and, therefore, could not have many effects.”

A gentleman was expatiating rather severely on the alleged inhospitable frugality of Lord Chancellor Eldon, and observed that he was so very parsimonious, that he never, hardly, gave a bottle

of wine to a friend. "I beg your pardon," said a young barrister; "I must defend the noble and learned lord in his absence: I have known his lordship to give a bottle of wine to half-a-dozen friends."

A few instances occur to the memory of smart contrast, or antithesis, in the criticism bestowed upon different books.

In a review of Hone's "Every-Day Book," a very neat compliment was conveyed to the merits of the work in a mere verbal contradiction of its title; namely, "This is *not* an every-day book!"

It was said of a work (which had been inspected by a severe critic), in terms which at first appeared very flattering, "There is a great deal in this book which is new, and a great deal that is true." So far good, the author would think; but then came the negation: "But it unfortunately happens, that those portions which are new are not true, and those which are true are not new!"

The sudden reversal in this judgment is something like the unexpected turn in a decision upon a contest in singing between two worthy friends, at Liverpool, whose vocal and musical powers were pretty accurately appreciated by the chosen

umpire. A wager was made on the occasion, and each gentleman, in turn, bored the ears of the company by his best possible effort in the tuneful art. On the first of the competitors standing up for sentence, the chairman said, "Sir, I am sorry to pronounce, in your case, that you are the worst singer I ever heard in my life!" At this moment, the other candidate for the laurel was seen rubbing his hands in ecstasy; his wager was evidently won; and he marched forward to meet his award with infinite glee. But what was his astonishment on being accosted by the chairman with, — "And you, my dear sir, cannot sing at all!"

In concluding a notice of a clever production, the witty critic expressed his idea of the merits of the work by a happy contrast: he said, he believed "the owner of the copyright would soon not have a copy left."

With the Irishman's notion of economy, as indicated by his mode of justifying the eating of butter with his bread and cheese, and with that of the butler who would save the small beer by the proximity of strong ale, we may connect the thrifty idea of the apprentice, who was busy toasting and devouring a liberal quantity of nice cheese

for supper, and to whom his master called out, reproachfully,—

“ You saucy rascal, what are you *toasting* the cheese for, eh ? ”

“ Whoy, mester, one can eyt such a deal more of it when it’s toasted.”

The master and the boy were evidently looking in different directions with reference to the value of the cheese.

In some rural districts, it is as much the custom for the families of farmers to hire into their houses a tailor or two, to make up clothing from materials already procured, as it is in towns to hire a milliner or dress-maker. They eat with any family they are working for, and receive small daily wages. A tailor and his apprentice were thus engaged for one day, and of course they sat down, at noon, to partake of the farmer’s substantial family-dinner, which comprised a display of bodily comfort such as they rarely encountered. The master-tailor, thoroughly enjoying the good things, and noticing that his apprentice was also remarkably diligent with his knife and fork, whispered to him,—

“ Now, Ralph, thou must eyt enough for to-morrow as well.”

“Ay,” quoth Ralph, smacking his lips, “I mean to do so; but—smack—I’m eyting for yesterday first.”

It will be observed, that in some of these specimens there is considerable affinity to the characteristics of Irish wit. There is contrast, and something more. In the tailor’s prudential advice to his chewbacon boy, for instance, there was a view to the saving of his own poor larder on the following day; but the lad himself took the opposite consideration, namely, certain arrears previously due to his vigorous appetite.

A lady was most anxious to set aside, or to deprive of its point, the jocular assertion often made, that women are great talkers—that they are more loquacious than men. She did not herself believe, she declared, that the ladies were more remarkable for eloquence than men.

“Do you really *think*, now, that it is anything more than a joke on the part of you men against us?”

Thus she catechised a gentleman who, she had little doubt, would politely assent to her view of the subject.

“Why, madam,” he kindly replied, “when opinions are so widely spread as to be indicated

by national expressions, they are generally believed to be correct; and you know, madam, in speaking of our country, we often allude to our Father-land, but in reference to our language, it is always our *Mother-tongue*."

Notwithstanding the undeniable point, neatness, and force of these instances, they still seem to fall short of the Irish specimens as a whole, in respect to the figurative or pictorial effect of the contrasts. They are good; but they are hardly so graphic as those of Irish origin.

Perhaps the following comes nearest to the Irish mark of extreme contrast, and at the same time to the Edinburgh Reviewer's idea of the *use* of practical wit, as illustrated in the anecdote of the monkey and the cocoa-nuts.

A powerful lunatic, as if bent upon some mad prank, escaped through an upper window of his asylum, and was followed upon the roof by his keeper, whom he seized with irresistible strength, exclaiming,—

"Now we'll immortalise ourselves, by jumping from this dizzy height down into the street. Come!" said he, clasping the keeper round the middle, and almost springing from the slates.

"Hold!" said the keeper, dreadfully alarmed,

but preserving his presence of mind—"hold, that will not do it—any fool can jump down: there's nothing in that: but we *will* astonish the world—we'll go down and jump up from the street to this place: *that's* the way!"

The madman was struck with the grandeur of the idea: it was more wonderful than his own; and he willingly accompanied his keeper below, to accomplish, as his heated imagination fancied, the extraordinary exploit.

We will now, once more, resort to our chief budget, to revel amongst what even a London oyster-dealer would admit to be "natives."

CHAPTER VII.

GENUINE IRISH WIT CONTINUED.

RETURNING to that description of wit for which the Irish are pre-eminent, we shall still find that contrast, sudden reversal, antipodean flight, will be its distinction.

It was past midnight, in a dark, cold, comfortless season, when a gentle but oft-repeated knock was heard at the door of a huge building, the domicile of a well-known institution in the metropolis, the inmates of which had all retired to rest. The knock, however, was perseveringly continued at intervals, until the matron put her head out of the window and inquired who was there at so unseasonable an hour.

“An’ sure, ma’am, it’s mysilf it is,” replied the plaintive voice of an Irishman; “it’s mysilf that’s wantin’ shelter till mornin’, for I’m cowl’d and hungry; and sure it’s a dacent Christian like you that’ll be after letting me in.”

“Get away, get away!” said the embarrassed matron; “this is no place for you. Get away, I say! For shame of you coming here! this is the Lying-in Hospital!”

“Oh, indeed, thin!” replied the poor fellow, “it’s the very place for me, for I’ve been lyin’ out these three nights!”

Teddy, the bill-sticker, was accused of having put a fine, large, valuable bill upside down on the wall. He never for a moment contemplated the turning of the bill the other way up. No; that is what an Englishman would have thought of: but he took the opposite view when rebuked for the circumstance.

“Is it so, indeed?” inquired he; “thin the people will only just have to stand on their heads, my darlin’, while they reads it, and they’ll see it all right!”

A conceited coxcomb, with a very patronising air, called out to an Irish labourer,—

“Here, you bogtrotter, come and tell me the greatest lie you can, and I’ll treat you to a jug of whisky-punch.”

“By my word,” said Pat, “an’ yer honour’s a *gentleman*!”

Some men would have tried to gain the prof-

ferred treat by uttering an absurdity of exaggeration on some indifferent subject ; others would have taken offence at the phraseology of the accostation, and the inference as to their laxity with regard to truth, and would probably have applied some coarse epithet to the party ; but Pat, as if by instinct, took the *opposite* course : he spoke courteously, but at the same time he adroitly availed himself of the terms of the proposition, not only to convey a meaning at variance with what he said, but to win the prize too ! This is a concentration of genuine ready wit.

A well-dressed passenger in a steam-boat suddenly missing his handsome silk-handkerchief, not only made a very bustling search after it about his pockets, the bench he sat on, and the feet of his neighbours, but asked a decent-looking Irishman near him if he had seen it.

“ Indeed, sor, I’ve seen nothing of your handkerchief.”

Shortly the question was repeated in an earnest and rather a significant manner.

“ I had it,” said the inquirer, “ only a few minutes ago, and I’ve not stirred from the place, and *really* ——”

“ Don’t talk to me, sor,” said the Hibernian,

sharply, "I tell ye I've seen nothing of it ; what do ye mane by tazing *me* about it ?"

On leaving the vessel sometime afterwards, the person informed the offended party that he had found the handkerchief ; it was in his hat all the time ; he begged pardon, &c.

"Oh, don't be after making any apology, sor ; it was a mere mistake, and on both sides too,—you took me for a thief, and I took you for a gentleman, that's all !"

The antithetic spirit clings to our Hibernian brother, even when he is in what he calls "foreign parts abroad." A fine exemplification of the fact occurred on the other side the Atlantic, in an incident which is well known, but which is too deservedly memorable to be omitted from any repository of Irish wit.

Jonathan and his friend, Paddy, were enjoying a delightful ride, when they came in sight of what is very unusual in any civilised state now-a-days—an old gallows or gibbet. This suggested to the American the idea of being witty at the expense of his Irish companion.

"You see *that*, I calculate," said he nasally, pointing to the object just mentioned ; "and now where would *you* be if the gallows had its due ?"

"Riding alone," coolly replied Paddy.

I know of no instance of greater wit, conveyed in two quiet words, than we meet with here ; and, certainly, the idea from which it sprung was very *opposite* to any thing Jonathan would have "guessed" at.

Bedford Row, the street in which the celebrated Abernethy resided, is a very broad thoroughfare, and, of course, the repavement of such a space of ground would be a work of time. A heap of stones had already lain before the worthy surgeon's door two days, when on the third morning, and in a very *nice* temper, as those who knew him may readily suppose, Abernethy came out to the steps of his house and imperiously called out to the paviers,—

"Take away those stones, you men ! take them away from there ; my patients cannot drive up to the door : and as I have borne this for two mornings already, I insist on their being removed instantly !"

The leader of the workmen was an Irishman, and he called out,—

"Oh, sor, give us a little more time for that same. Sure, it's a broad place this ; we can't compleat the work as quickly as in a narrow

street. But to-morrow we'll be past you, sure enough."

"Take them away, I say!"

"Indeed, sor, ony luk at the sand there, and the heap o' things there, and the road we must keep open beyant; and where will we take 'em to?"

"Take them to —, if you like, so that they are out of *my* way," said Abernethy, pointing downwards, stamping his foot, and naming a warm place.

"Oh, sor," replied the Hibernian, as if shocked at what he had heard, but with a laugh in his eye,—"oh, sor, I think if we tuk 'em to the other place," and he pointed upwards, "they would be more out of yer honour's way!"

It could not for a moment be supposed by those who were acquainted with Judith and Ellen, two humble neighbours in a village in Ireland, that they were remarkably profound in polemics, but it appears that, like many other ignorant people, they were controversialists nevertheless. Judith was an Irish Roman Catholic, Ellen was an Irish Protestant, and each was, of course, confident of being in the right way.

"Sure," said Judith, "mine's the throe faith and nothing else, Nelly. Isn't the pope a Roman,

and the cardinals, and the priests ? and isn't it all larned men they are ? and would they be such fools as to be wrong all the time ? No, no, Nelly, not they."

"Ah ! and indeed, but yours is *not* the right faith, Judy ; not a bit of it. I'll be no Roman, but a thrue Prodestant, for it's the rale thrue religion. Isn't the queen a Prodestant ? and the great archbishops, and bishops, and clargy, and all them ? and arn't they larned in the colleges, and knows the langiges ? To be sure ; and they knows what's right, depind upon it, Judy."

"Ah !" replied Judith, "but you're sadly mistaken, Nelly, any how ; and I can give you Scriptor proof mine's the thrue religion."

"Oh, thin," said Ellen, "if it's Scriptor you can give for it, that's another thing ; but how can ye ?"

"Why, Nelly, my dear," said Judith, "have you got a Bible ?"

"Troth I have," said Ellen, exultingly ; "and I knows a good dale that's in it, too."

"Well, thin," inquired Judith, "isn't there St. Paal's Epistle to the Romans ?"

"To be sure there is," answered Ellen ; "and what of that ?"

"Why," said Judith, with an air of confident triumph, "where's his epistle to the Prodestants?"

Poor Ellen saw no means of getting over this, and the debate was postponed *sine die*.

I think I cannot better conclude my proofs than with the following:—

A merry evening party, in an English country-town, were bantering poor Teddy about his countrymen being so famous for bulls.

"By my faith," said Teddy, "*you* needn't talk about that same in *this* place; you're as fond of bulls as any people in all the world, so you are."

"Nonsense!" some of the party replied; "how do you make that out?"

"Why, sure, it's very aisy, it is; for in this paltry bit of a town you've got more public-houses nor I ever seen wid the sign of the bull over the doore, so you have."

"Nay, Teddy, very few of those; but there's some of 'em, you know, in every town."

"Yes," said Teddy, obstinately sticking to his text, for he had laid a trap for his friends, "but you've more nor your share, barring that you're so fond of bulls, as I say; I'm sure I can count half-a-dozen of 'em."

"Pooh, nonsense!" cried the party; "that will never do: what'll you bet on that, Teddy? You're out there, my boy, depend upon it; we know the town as well as you, and what will you bet?"

"Indeed, my brave boys, I'll not bet at all; I'm no better, I assure ye,—I should be worse if I wur." This sally tickled his companions, and he proceeded. "But I'll be bound to name and count the six."

"Well, do, do," said several voices.

"Now, let me see: there's the Black Bull."

"Yes, that's one."

"Then there's the Red Bull."

"That's two."

"And the White Bull."

"Come, that's three."

"And the Pied Bull."

"So there is; you'll not go much further."

"And then there's — there's — there's — the Golden Bull, in — what's it street?"

"Well done, Teddy; that's five, sure enough: but you're short yet."

"Ay," said a little letter-carrier, who sat smirking in the corner, "and he *will* be short, for there isn't one more, *I* know."

“And then, remimber,” continued Teddy, carefully pursuing his enumeration, “there’s the Dun Cow.”

At this, a burst of laughter fairly shook the room, and busy hands kept the tables and glasses rattling amidst boisterous cries of “A bull ! a bull !” Looking serious at all around, Teddy deliberately asked,—

“Do you call that a bull ?”

“To be sure, it’s a bull !” exclaimed several voices at once.

“Then,” said Teddy, “that’s the sixth !”

Here an unavoidable defeat in the direct was converted into a victory in the antipodean, by the cleverly obtained admission of the vanquished party themselves.

CHAPTER VIII.

WIT OF ALL NATIONS.

IN the quotation from the "Edinburgh Review," given in Chapter II., where the pelting of the monkey is described, it is said, "this scheme of gathering cocoa-nuts is very witty, and would be more so if it did not appear useful ; for the idea of utility is always inimical to the idea of wit." I must venture to dissent from this opinion in some degree, and to suggest that it is the continuance of the utility, by frequent resort to the practice, which deteriorates the effect of the wit by destroying its novelty. He who first thought of the plan, and realised it, would be applauded as witty by the bystanders who were capable of appreciating it, to whom, indeed, the utility would rather heighten the enjoyment ; but when it became well known, and was repeatedly practised, surprise would cease,

and the wit be, perhaps, forgotten. It was decidedly wit, notwithstanding its utility, which saved the keeper's life in the instance of the lunatic spoken of in Chapter VI.

Wit, the very name of which is derived from wisdom, surprises and pleases when it displays the conception and application of remote ideas for the purposes of attaining an object. This is clearly shewn in the case here referred to, and in the Reviewer's appropriate anecdote of Louis XIV. and the officer. It also appears in the instance of the boy and his drumstick.

The little fellow had dropped his drumstick into a very deep well, the water in which merely covered the stones at the bottom—it was, of course, entirely out of his reach; and although he repeatedly did his utmost to teaze mamma into the giving of an order that the footman should put down a long ladder and fetch it up for him, the expenditure of time and labour on so trifling an affair was by no means conceded as reasonable. Deprived of his toy, and his power of making a noise in the world, for several days he was in no very good humour with himself or others: his loss, however, was soon forgotten by every one but himself. All at once, on a

subsequent day, the silver ladle was missing out of the plate-basket, at a time when the tureen was in requisition ; much alarm was felt, and inquiries and searchings instituted without number. During the afternoon the lost treasure was seen shining at the bottom of the deep well. How *could* it get there ? nobody had the remotest idea of such a thing. John must descend the well *immediately*, which, proper means being obtained and adjusted for the purpose, he did. When he was at the bottom, the little boy called out, " John, now that you *are* down there, you may as well bring up my drumstick with you."

In a small village, at no remote distance from Preston, resides a worthy itinerant vender of tea and coffee, whose " better half" had been in so very precarious a state of health that her husband, as well as the doctors, well-nigh despaired of her convalescence. At length, however, after all other sanative means had failed, the good man thought he would try what he could do either by way of killing or curing. He arrived at home one evening, after his day's journey in the country, and drawing his chair to the fire, close to his wife, accosted her as follows :—

" Jane, love, ar ta onny better ?"

"No, William, I dunna think I am."

"Well, Jane, it's loikely aar time's short i' this world together."

"Ay, William, I think t'same."

"Well, Jane, I never did deceive thee, and I'll not naa. I met wi' a woman to-day i' Bretherton, just loike thee, and I tow'd her tha was ill, and loikely to dee, and hoo wod just suit me, and hoo said as soon as tha deed I mon let her know, and hoo'd ha me."

Jane was roused by this announcement, and, starting from her seat, declared, "She'd never dee to suit him nor hor."

From that time she has continued to improve in health and strength daily.

Wit in the form of persuasion, too, and also in the form of a disappointing (because only apparent) acquiescence in your assertions or wishes, and in many displays of its power (for it is a great power), appears in numerous instances in various countries. Of these we will take a few specimens.

If the French officer was witty in acquiescing in the unfavourable observation of his royal master, there was an English boy who must have credit for smartness too.

A youth was disdainfully spoken to by a self-conceited, middle-aged fop, who, in answer to something said by the boy, exclaimed,—

“Why, sir, you might be a fool,—a fool, sir!”

“Well, indeed, sir,” replied he, quietly looking askance, “I am very near one.”

An Englishman had landed at Kingstown, and Delany was the lucky fellow selected from the eager many to carry the stranger’s portmanteau up to the neighbouring hotel.

“And now what am I to give you for this little job?” was the inquiry when they reached the door.

“Ah, sure sor, it isn’t for the likes o’ me to say to a gintleman like your honour what you’ll be plased to give me.”

Here Delany had fixed *one* point, namely, his own *humility* and *poverty* in contrast with his employer’s superior *judgment* and *means*.

“But I am a stranger,” said the gentleman, “and not acquainted with the custom of the place; just say what you think is reasonable.”

“Oh, no sor, what your generosity plases; only I will say, that whatever your honour gives I’ll be after dividing it betune myself and Norah, and the five childer I’ve got at home.”

There can be little doubt that the result would prove that this was wit of the persuasive order ; the enumeration of *seven* persons being a clever mode of induction, carrying the estimate and the hint beyond the common amount of a *sixpenny* fee.

An Englishman, dining in a Chinese village, was greatly enjoying a savoury dish,—something of a hash, it appeared—and would have expressed his pleasure to the waiter, a tall, solemn “Celestial,” who, however, understood nothing of English, nor could our friend utter a word of the language of China. But though eloquence was, therefore, denied them at the time, wit was present, and answered the purpose. The smacking of lips indicated satisfaction, and then came a question, ingeniously put. Pointing at the portions of meat in the dish, and which he supposed to be duck, the Englishman, with an inquiring look, said, “Quack, quack, quack ?”

The waiter, gravely shaking his head, as much as to say “No,” replied, “Bow, wow, wow !”

This unfortunate discovery led to the dropping of knife and fork, and the sudden termination of the repast, to the unspeakable surprise of the caterer.

Here wit, on both sides, accomplished an object by the readiest means—the avoidance of unintelligible speech and the adoption of a universal language.

A dashing fellow, who seemed to think he manifested his superiority by the disdain he exhibited of any thing like courtesy to the humbler classes of society, was driving his gig one rainy day, when he came to a toll-bar, and haughtily asked what was to pay.

“Eight pence, if you please,” said the civil gatekeeper.

Instead of handing the money to him, our grandee threw a shilling carelessly on the wet and muddy ground.

“There, take your change out of that.”

The keeper stooped for the silver, and placing the copper exactly on the same spot, walked coolly into his cottage.

This was ready, practical wit, in the style of the *lex talionis*, or “tit for tat.”

In St. Anne’s Square, Manchester, a handsome carriage and pair were standing at the door of a fashionable shop, into which the ladies, who had alighted, had entered, on the usual errand of tasteful expenditure, and a gentleman remained in the carriage reading. The vehicle, the horses,

the livery, and appointments, were all of a superior order, and attracted the especial attention of two friends, who stood conversing at a neighbouring shop-door.

“Ah,” said one to the other, “that’s something handsome now. How I should like to be driven out in such an equipage as that!”

“Well,” replied the other, coolly, “you have only to step in at once, and you will be driven out immediately, I warrant you.”

Here was wit in the form of a disappointing acquiescence.

This reminds me of one of Lord Chief Justice Ellenborough’s cruelly witty acquiescences, as related by Townshend.

A young counsel commenced his stammering speech with the remark, “The unfortunate client who appears by me——” and then he came to a full stop; beginning again, after an embarrassed pause, with a repetition of the remark, “My unfortunate client——.” He did not find his fluency of speech quickened by the calm raillery of the judge, who interposed, in his softest tone, “Pray go on, so far the court is quite with you.”

Lord Mansfield has credit for a similar agreement in opinion.

When Sir Fletcher Norton, who was not distinguished for his refinement, was pleading before Lord Mansfield on some question of manorial rights, he chanced unfortunately to say,—

“My lord, I can illustrate the point by an instance in my own person ; I, myself, have two little manors——”

The judge immediately interposed, with one of his blindest smiles,—

“We all know it, Sir Fletcher.”

Some rude, young, fashionables meeting a lady of very florid complexion, said, loud enough to be heard by her on passing,—

“Painted, by G— !”

“Yes,” she mildly replied, “painted by God.”

Wit in this form has been displayed even in very humble life.

A pompous parish clergyman felt his dignity mightily offended by a chubby-faced lad, who was passing him without moving his hat.

“Do you know who I am, sir, that you pass in that unmannerly way ? You are better fed than taught, I think, sir.”

“Whoy, maybe it is so, mestur ; for yo teyches me, but I feeds mysel.”

In a hedgerow school, the perplexed master,

addressing an unruly, careless lad, who gave him more trouble than all the spalpeens together, emphatically said,—

“I do wish you’d be after paying a *little* attintion to what I’m telling av ye.”

“So I am,” replied the impudent urchin; “I’m paying as little as I can.”

A similar anecdote is related of Wewitzer, in the theatrical world, but I am inclined to think the original is Irish.

Poor Sullivan called out to Pat,—

“I’m raily afraid you’ll never be after paying me that two-and-twenty shillings I lent you last Christmas was a twelvemonth.”

“Troth,” replied Pat, “I’m very much of that same opinion myself.”

And if I quote a few anecdotes in which puns appear, it will be because there is something in them *better* than mere puns, and beyond them in the range of idea.

It is recorded of Foote, who had just returned from visiting Ireland for the first time, that he was asked whether, whilst in the Green Isle, he had seen Cork.

“No,” was his reply; “but when I was in Dublin I saw a great many drawings of it.”

This is admirable wit, including two puns, one on the name of a city, the other on an act of hospitality; and both adroitly hit upon to convey a happy insinuation of the festive doings the speaker had been enjoying.

During a commercial panic in England some years ago, the merchants were gathered as usual on 'Change at Liverpool, when the universal conversation turned upon the gloomy state of affairs: failures hourly announced from different towns, and dishonoured drafts flying about, so that no one could anticipate whose embarrassment would come next. Birds were chirping away in the Corinthian capitals of the columns of the building, and occasionally passing over-head to the opposite side of the quadrangle.

"Ah, those happy sparrows," said one merchant to another, "how I envy them! *they* have no blessed acceptances to meet."

("Blessed" was not the word he used; it was something shorter, spoken in rather a curs-ory way.)

"That's true," replied his friend; "and yet they have their bills to provide for as well as ourselves."

It is not unworthy of remark that wit may

be considered as being decidedly on the increase, if it be any criterion that when a thing is scarce it is particularised, and its owner or producer "immortalised," and that when it is plentiful, it is itself only, and not its origin, that is chronicled. Here are some instances in point : the first being of the personally-identified class :—

When Cape wine was first introduced into England, a merchant with whom Sheridan was dining brought out a single bottle, which he had received as a sample, and begged the opinion of his guests on its merits. It was thoroughly approved, and another bottle was urgently called for. The host declared, upon his honour, that he could not gratify the company by any more of the wine ; it was a mere sample, a single bottle, and he was glad they liked it.

"Well, well," said Sheridan, "if we cannot double the Cape we must return to Madeira."

In this excellent geographical *jeu de mot*, and a thousand similar anecdotes of the past generation, names and details thus generally accompany the story ; but now we have scores of equally good things floating through the papers anonymously.

Ex. gr. :—

"Ma, whereabout in the maps shall I find the State of Matrimony?"

"Oh, my dear, that is one of the United States."

"Pay me that six-and-eightpence you owe me, Mr. Mulrooney," said a village attorney.

"For what?"

"For the opinion you had of me."

"Faith, I never had any opinion of you in all my life."

Terence broke a shop-window by accident, and ran away with all speed; the shopkeeper gave chase and captured him.

"You rogue, pay me five shillings for the broken pane."

"Sure and wasn't I running home to fetch the money for ye as fast as I could?"

Foote's powers of mimicry once grievously offended a gentleman, who went to remonstrate with him very seriously for "taking him off," as he called it.

"Bless you," said the wit, "don't be displeased at that; I very often take myself off, by way of amusement."

"Why, do you so?"

"I do, indeed," replied Foote, coolly taking up his hat and leaving the room.

It has been ascribed to the Queen, that on asking "the Duke" what kind of boots he had on, and being answered that people called them "Wellingtons," she exclaimed,—

"What impudence! Where will they find a pair of Wellingtons, I should like to know?"

The reader need not stop to inquire into the authenticity of such ascriptions to illustrious individuals. When people make jokes they often take the liberty to attach names to their anecdotes, just to suit their fancy, as the late Sir William Curtis, Mr. Sam Rogers, and others could testify.

It was a good play upon words by which a lazy, unpunctual man, was greeted on his happening to be early at an appointed meeting one day: "Why, you are first at last; you have always been behind before!"

And a little gentleman very truthfully said he never lay long in bed, nor ever wore a great coat.

William IV. seemed in a momentary dilemma one day, when, at table with several officers, he ordered one of the waiters to "take away that marine there," pointing to an empty bottle.

"Your majesty!" inquired a colonel of marines, "do you compare an empty bottle to a member of our branch of the service?"

"Yes," replied the monarch, as if a sudden thought had struck him; "I mean to say it has done its duty once, and is ready to do it again."

This *amende* was greatly admired.

Wit in an influential form was displayed by the Quaker gentleman soliciting subscriptions for a distressed widow, for whom every body expressed the greatest sympathy.

"Well," said he, "every body declares he is sorry for her; I am truly sorry—I am sorry five pounds. How much art thou sorry, friend? and thou? and thou?"

He was very successful, as may be supposed.

One of those to whom the case was described said he *felt* very much, indeed, for the poor widow.

"But hast thou felt in thy pocket?" inquired the "friend."

And Paddy succeeded by wit not quite so disinterested. He saw a good dinner passing up behind the jeweller's handsome shop, and even perceived the savoury smell from the kitchen below the front window. It was irresistible, and

he walked quietly in, asking the master what he could afford to give for a piece of pure gold about the size of a brick. His clumsy allusion to dimensions, instead of ounces and grains, convinced the tradesman there was a good bargain to be had from one so uninitiated in the business. But his dinner he intimated was ready; he hoped the "gentleman" would favour him with his company—they could talk more at leisure on so important a subject over a glass of generous wine, and so forth. Paddy modestly assented to the proposal, enjoyed a dinner such as he had not tasted for months, kept pace with his host in giving judgment on the wine, and then begged to retire.

"But about the piece of gold, sir? the piece about the size of a brick you named in the shop?"

"Oh, ay," said Paddy, "that's thrue—I'd almost forgotten it; but I just wanted to know, sir, how much you could give for it, supposing I should ever be after finding such a thing."

An Irish lad saw a train of his compeers, driving their carts laden with baskets of turf, coming towards his father's cabin, which they must pass. His father's stock of turf was nearly

exhausted, and the question was how a supply should be obtained. To beg he was ashamed, to dig he was unwilling; but the lad had been considering the question for him. He fixed a turf on the top of a pole near the cabin, and as the carts approached he appeared to be throwing turf at the mark.

"Boys," cried he, "which av ye will hit?"

Each driver of a cart took a spirited fling at the target, with more or less success, but the real triumph was that of the poor lad, whose ingenuity was soon rewarded by a heap of turf at the foot of the pole.

The power of wit in the form of compliment has often won friends for Paddy.

An Hibernian florist, upon whose bouquets an elderly lady was gazing, whilst her daughter stooped to enjoy the fragrance, said,—

"My dear young lady, your beautiful face down there will put the lady out of consait intirely with them nice roses and lilies."

And the fishmonger was equally happy when the lady, touching some of his prime white fish, observed that the colour was not quite so white and delicate as she had seen it sometimes.

"Oh, ma'am, that's owin' to your ladyship's

hand, it is ; if you will only put your glove on, you will see the fish is most iligant."

I have not hitherto said any thing on the subject of American wit ; partly, because it has hardly assumed any very distinct character—at least only one, and that has been a good deal misunderstood. It has been taken as consisting of outrageous exaggeration, but it is not so ; or, rather, it includes something far more piquant than mere hyperbole—something manifesting genius in the shape of startling and humorous invention. There is no wit in the unadorned Munchausenisms of which Brother Jonathan is too frequently accused ; there is no wit in saying that such a one was so lusty that it would take you a fortnight to walk round him, or so tall that you had to ascend a ladder in order to speak to him. Jonathan has more brilliance in him than such nonsense would indicate ; if his wit begins in exaggeration, it does not end there. A few specimens will suffice to mark the class of witticisms for which, at present, our transatlantic friends have credit in the literary world.

A young lady threw herself into the box in the post-office window instead of her letter, nor

did she discover her mistake till the clerk asked if she were single.

A negro was so very black, that when he went into the poultry-yard the fowls betook themselves to roost, believing that the gloom diffused around was that of sunset.

An absent-minded gentleman put his watch into the saucepan instead of an egg, which latter he held patiently in his hand for three minutes.

A farmer had a scythe so exceedingly sharp that, having hung it upon the bough of a tree, on a moonlight night, a poor man passing by had his leg cut off by its shadow.

A lady who was a strict observer of etiquette, being unable to go to church one Sunday, sent her card.

A proposal was made to build ships of caoutchouc, now that that substance is applied to almost every conceivable use, and the idea was warmly encouraged, till a gentleman objected to it on the score that vessels constructed of that material would inevitably rub "the line" out.

An aurist was so remarkably clever, that having exercised his skill on a very deaf lady indeed, who had been hitherto insensible to the nearest and loudest noises, she had the happiness next



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day of hearing from her husband in South Australia.

A village in the Far West had not within all its borders a single barometer, and, therefore, the weather did whatever it liked.

A man in Kentucky imitated the crowing of a cock so perfectly, and sometimes indulged in the freak so early in the morning, that upon one occasion the sun, in mistake, rose two hours before its proper time.

In all these, and in scores that might be quoted, there is *ingenuity* as well as laughable extravagance of idea.

CHAPTER IX.

BLUNDERS OF ALL NATIONS.

AFTER what has appeared in the foregoing pages, I need not say how entirely I agree with Mr. and Miss Edgeworth in their well-sustained and well-illustrated argument, that many of the most familiar and reputedly Irish bulls are not of Irish origin, or do not belong peculiarly to the Hibernian nation. I have no hesitation in believing that hundreds of blunders of all sorts, which have been committed in various nations, and in ages long past, have been recently fathered on the Irish, as the jokes of yesterday. Let not my readers suppose that, in making this admission, I have any desire to absolve the Irish nation from its high renown of bull-making. I should be sorry to be under the necessity of doing so, for reasons "plenty as blackberries." We have seen what a genuine Irish bull *is*, so that we may almost

always trace its parentage ; but at present I have to confirm Mr. and Miss Edgeworth in their exoneration of the Irish from the thousand-and-one blunders that are daily and hourly attributed to them.

Even the blunder said to have been committed by the tall Irishman overlooking the gentleman writing in a coffee-house, and which has already been noticed, is thus alluded to by Mr. and Miss Edgeworth :—

“ This blunder is unquestionably excellent, but it is not originally Irish ; it comes, with other riches, from the East, as the reader may find by looking into a book by M. Golland, entitled ‘ The Remarkable Sayings of the Eastern Nations.’—‘ A learned man was writing to a friend, a troublesome fellow was beside him, who was looking over his shoulder at what he was writing. The learned man, who perceived this, continued writing in these words : ‘ If an impertinent fellow, who stands beside me, were not looking at what I write, I would write many other things to you, which should be known only to you and me.’ The troublesome fellow, who was reading on, now thought it incumbent upon him to speak, and he said, ‘ I swear to you that I have not read, or

looked at what you are writing !' The learned man replied, 'Blockhead as you are, why then do you say to me what you are now saying ?' "

Mr. and Miss Edgeworth proceed :—

" We know not any original Irish blunder superior to this, unless it be that which Lord Orford pronounced to be the best bull he had ever heard. 'I hate that woman,' said a gentleman, looking at one who had been his nurse,— 'I hate that woman, for she changed me at nurse.' Lord Orford admires this bull, because, in the confusion of the blunderer's ideas, he is not clear even of his personal identity."

" But we find a similar blunder in Spain, in the time of Cervantes. 'Pray, tell me, squire,' says the duchess in 'Don Quixote,' 'is not your master the person whose history is printed under the name of the sage Hidalgo Don Quixote de la Mancha, who professes himself the admirer of one Dulcinea del Toboso ?' 'The very same, my lady,' answered Sancho ; 'and I myself am that very squire of his who is mentioned, or ought to be mentioned, in that history, *unless they have changed me in the cradle.*' "

Again :—

" An Irishman accosting another, said, 'When

first I saw you, I thought it was you, but now I see it is your brother.' ”

This “Irishman” is clearly traced to Cicero, who makes a very similar blunder in one of his compliments to Cæsar. But I shall quite match it in an undoubtedly Irish anecdote by-and-by.

In distributing the charge of mere blundering over all the world, which they are completely successful in doing, Mr. and Miss Edgeworth quote bulls from high authority.

“Talking of Satan, Milton says,—

‘God and his Son except,
Created thing nought valued he nor shunn’d.’

And speaking of Adam and Eve, and their sons and daughters, he confounds them altogether in a manner for which any Irishman would have been laughed at unmercifully :—

‘Adam, the goodliest of men since born
His sons ;—the fairest of her daughters, Eve.’

Shakespeare says (the words are Ariel’s, in the “Tempest”),—

‘Now bid me run,
And I will strive with things impossible,
Yea, get the better of them.’ ”

In Blackmore’s “Prince Arthur” we have the following :—

“ A painted vest Prince Vortigern had on,
Which from a naked Pict his grandsire won.”

And Lord Chesterfield, at the very moment of advising attention to strict accuracy of expression, says, “ Consider your style, even in the freest conversation. After, at least, *if not before*, you have said a thing, reflect if you could not *have said* it better.”

These are genuine English bulls, with the exception, perhaps, of the quotation from the “*Tempest*,” which seems to me rather an intentional *hyperbole*, or poetical assumption of the spirit Ariel, who proposed to accomplish things which mortals would deem impossible.

There is no doubt, however, that Mr. and Miss Edgeworth, by the aid of numerous well-selected quotations, completely establish their case that blundering is common to all nations, though it is the fashion in England to date the most stupid, as well as the most amusing, examples from Ireland.

This part of the subject might here be dismissed, but I promised to confirm Mr. and Miss Edgeworth’s views by additional facts ; and, as blunders are entertaining, a few specimens will, I trust, be in season, if introduced here.

If we take BLUNDERS in CONDUCT — Irish instances — we have that of the Irish rebels burning the banker's notes by way of revenge upon him, when they were, in fact, rendering him the utmost service by so doing.

An Irish gentleman, building a house, ordered a pit to be dug to contain the heaps of rubbish left by the workmen ; his steward asked what they should do with the earth out of the pit ? “ Make it large enough to hold both the rubbish and the earth, to be sure,” said he.

An Irishman is represented standing in a boat, and trying to pull it back by the rope attached to the prow.

Teddy declared he would turn his stocking, because he had discovered a hole in it.

Another is caricatured as holding a glass before his face, but with his eyes shut, and saying he wished to ascertain how he looked in his sleep.

The Irish gardener is described as being requested to set his master's watch by his sun-dial, when he forthwith “ planted ” it in the ground close to it.

A footman, despatched on a like errand, was puzzled how to execute his commission, and lifting

the dial from its pedestal, brought it to his master, saying, *he* could do it best.

This might be a blunder of ignorance, and so was that of the Irish recruit who enlisted in the 21st regiment, and being rallied for selecting that particular corps, declared he had a brother in the 22d, and he wished to be as near him as possible.

Now, these can be more than set off by English and other instances :—

The boots at the Royal Oak Inn, at Lancaster, had deposited his savings, amounting to 80*l.*, in a country bank, about twenty miles distant: an unfavourable rumour reaching his ears about the bank being likely to fail, he walked to the place with his cheque, bringing back the banker's own notes, and rejoicing at his good fortune.

A public body, at Liverpool, had a room built over a small market-place; and it was not till the last planks of the floor were about to be fastened down that it was discovered that no staircase had been erected: the usual ladders had served the workmen, and it had been forgotten.

A worthy gentleman of the same town, who was about to plunge into the deep end of the floating-bath, though he could not swim, was informed that the depth just there was five feet nine

inches: "Is that all?" said he; "I'm just five feet ten;" and in he plunged, as if he had supposed his mouth was at the top of his head; and, even then, he would have been within an inch of his life. He was, of course, extricated, and laughed at.

The lady called to the footman to snuff the candles, or the horrid wicks would grow up to the ceiling.

Hogarth sketches a practical blunder in a picture, representing a man sitting on a sign-post, projecting from the house, and cutting it off between himself and the wall.

An English servant-girl, on finding that the postman had not a letter for her, asked him if he thought he would have one for her to-morrow.

Another servant-girl called at a printer's, stating that her mistress wanted a very small, neat bible, but the print must be very large, as she was growing old; and she wished it printed immediately, and she would call for it on returning from market.

This is, of course, a blunder of ignorance: and so was that of the servant-girl, in Liverpool, who, being desired to clean the celestial globe very

carefully, rubbed out the stars, thinking they were specks of dirt.

The traveller, when asked, whether, in his youth, he had gone through Euclid, was not quite sure, but he thought it was a small village between Wigan and Preston.

And if we take **BLUNDERS OF EXPRESSION** — in Irish instances — we have a proclamation by the Lord-Lieutenant and Council of Ireland: “Whereas, the greatest economy is necessary in the consumption of all species of grain, and especially in the consumption of potatoes,” &c. &c.

A fortnight’s imprisonment in gaol was thought a trifling sentence, because, as it was in the depth of winter, the days were so short.

The two fatigued travellers, having to travel ten miles farther, comforted themselves by the calculation that it was only five miles each.

The inscription on a sign-post was followed by the intimation, “If you can’t read, inquire at the blacksmith’s shop.”

An Irishman announced to his neighbour the birth of his child. “Is it a boy?” was the question. “No.” “Then it’s a girl.” “Sure, somebody has been after telling you.”

The well-known telescope of Joseph Miller, Esq., brought the distant church so near, that Paddy declared he could hear the congregation singing.

An Irish gentleman hearing it said that the Chapter Coffee-room was the oldest coffee-house in London, interposed, "I beg your pardon; the Chapter Coffee-house *was* the oldest coffee-house in London, but it is not so now, for an older one has been set up."

A broth of a boy, rejoicing in the cognomen of Teddy Maguire, was examined as a witness in a case as to the quality of oatmeal. The questioning counsel wished to make it appear that when bad oats were brought to the mill for sale, they were refused by the buyer.

"Did you ever see Mr. Murdock return oats?" inquired the counsel.

"Yes, your honour," was the reply.

"On what ground did he refuse them?" was next asked by the learned counsel.

"In the back-yard," said Teddy, amidst the laughter of the court.

These also can be overbalanced by English and other parallels.

In an act of parliament an offence was visited

by a penalty of 200*l.*; one half to the king, and the other half to the informer; this not being found severe enough, instead of the pecuniary penalty was substituted fourteen years' transportation; but still His Majesty and the informer were left to receive their respective moieties,—an error which was not detected till the bill had passed the Commons, and reached the committee in the Lords.

A lady wondered how it was that a set of blind boys could romp so cheerfully and so safely in the play-ground after dark.

A visitor at Churchtown, North Meols, thought people must like to be buried in the churchyard *there*, because it was so healthy.

A servant-girl, writing a letter, asked her master if the next month had come in yet; he laughed. "Well," said she, "what I mean is,—has the last month gone out yet?"

A well-known gentleman in Liverpool, an antiquarian author, having seen some deaf and dumb pupils from Claremont, Dublin, answering questions by writing on a black board, asked Mr. Humphreys whether the boys had learned to read yet.

A tradesman of Bolton leaving a neighbour in

Manchester, who was doubtful of reaching home that night, was requested to express that doubt to his family, lest they should be uneasy: he did so, by calling and saying,—“I saw your James at Manchester, and he said I was to tell you, that if he comes, he comes; and if he does not, you need not expect him.”

In Sloman’s song of “the Maid of Judah,” we are told,—

“ So sweetly she *sang*, as in *silence* she strayed
O’er the ruins of Babylon’s towers.”

An English girl asked her mistress whether Good-Friday would not fall on a Saturday next year? “Why?” “Because if it does, you know, ma’am, we shall have two Sundays together.”

An English village politician was afraid that, if strict control were not exercised over the clergy, they would be increasing their demands for tithes from one-tenth to one-twentieth of the farmer’s produce.

A small-ware dealer, on hearing the text,—
“Darkness covered the earth, and gross darkness the people,” observed how solemn that was;
“Darkness is bad enough of itself,” said he,

“but only think of a gross — that’s twelve dozen of darkness, you know ; how dark *that* must be ! It’s dreadful !”

A gentleman declared the vessel in the river was so deeply laden — the water was so nearly up to the gunwale — that, if the tide rose any higher, she must sink.

Another, who had been at the Blue-Coat Hospital, the other day, to see the boys promenade and dine, a sight which he had enjoyed twenty years before, evinced some dissatisfaction on returning to his lodgings, and expressed his conviction that the children were ill-used, because they did not appear to him to be any bigger at all, then, than they were on the former occasion.

A royal personage is said to have inquired of a bystander for some one who could speak German ; the reply was, “I do not know any body who speaks German, but I have a brother who plays the German flute, if that will do.”

This is what I call coming near the mark as much as possible : establishing an affinity, as it were, of which there are other instances.

A caricature represents a lady playing on the piano to amuse a rustic young man, and she asks

him if he is musical; "No, ma'am," says he, "I am not musical myself, but I have an excellent snuff-box that is."

A young woman, noticing the applause which a traveller elicited by his detail of foreign scenes and incidents, was asked, in her turn, whether *she* had ever been abroad. "No," she replied, "I have not exactly; but I have an uncle that once talked of going to the Isle of Man."

In all these cases there was the desire to be *near* the mark; the simple, truthful negative appearing too humble.

A recent number of the *Saratoga Sentinel* (U. S.) records a bull uttered by Mr. Pollard, of Baltimore, the well-known temperance lecturer, in America. In a speech at a meeting in the Presbyterian Church of that place, he used the words, "Fathers, you have children; or, if *you* have not, your *daughters* may have."

Another American paper, describing the riots at Philadelphia, says, "One discharge from the cannon of the rioters killed twenty soldiers, who, in their turn, rushed on the populace, firing on them," &c.

An ignorant but well-meaning man having been placed on the commission of the peace in a

rural district in England, declared, on taking his seat as a magistrate, that it would, indeed, be his most anxious endeavour to do justice without fear, favour, or affection. "In short," said he, emphatically, "I will take care that on this bench I will never be either partial or impartial."

This brings to mind the declaration of the Irish magistrate, who said he could always decide well enough on a case after hearing the first statement, but that when the other side had given his story, it bothered him exceedingly.

A quarrel happening between an old French gentleman and his son, the former reproached the latter with ingratitude. "I am under no obligation to you," replied the young man; "on the contrary; for if you had never been born, I should now have been heir to my grandfather."

In a life of St. Francis Xavier, written by an Italian, it is stated that "by one sermon he converted ten thousand persons on a desert island."

A Spanish lady of rank was asked in company if she had ever come across the Dardanelles. "No," she replied, "never; but I understand they are very charming women."

Abundance of blunders may be quoted from every quarter. Even the skilful arithmetic of the

two travellers, with their five miles each, is matched by Mr. and Miss Edgeworth, who name a similar error made by the Chevalier Lorenzo, at Florence.

And it is said that the inhabitants of the German town of Hirschau, in the Upper Palatinate, are famous for making bulls. If this be the case to an extent which renders it remarkable, it may safely be "guessed" that the said inhabitants are impetuous in their speech, and prone to use figurative language, as Mr. and Miss Edgeworth would suggest; and I may add, that if they are, moreover, addicted to flying to mental contrarities, they will be "famous" for witticisms as well as "bulls."

And I have seen a curious set of blunders arising from attempts at comparison.

In comparisons, nowadays, there has been found a royal road to avoid all difficulty, for whatever requires such illustration, has it in the useful article called bricks. Every thing is done, dressed, said, or sang; every thing runs, fetches, or carries, fights, or plays,—like bricks.

But Paddy has credit for some blunders which arise from misapprehension of language. As Mr. and Miss Edgeworth very properly observe, "English is not the mother-tongue of the natives of Ireland; to them it is a foreign language, and,

consequently, it is scarcely within the limits of probability that they should avoid making blunders, both in speaking and writing."

As a case in point, I recollect an Irish watchman (one of the old school of that order of guardians) being brought before the board of Commissioners of the Watch, &c., at Liverpool, charged with having been asleep on duty. One of the commissioners addressed the sheepish-looking offender.

"So, sir, you are lethargic, I understand?"

"Sor?" said the man, looking down to the table and up to the ceiling, and then upon vacancy, as if some awful charge were conveyed in the expression.

"It appears that you are lethargic, I say."

"No, sor, I'm not," suddenly replied the poor fellow; "I'm a Protestant."

An imperfect knowledge of the English language will account for many ill-assorted expressions. Not only will the Irish speak of "elegant weather," but I have heard a farmer in the county of Wicklow lamenting that, owing to the absence of those who should have been a resident gentry, he was obliged to sell his butter,—
"iligant butther, sor, sixpence a-pound."

"Don't you think the prisoner labours under mental debility?" inquired a magistrate.

"I do, indeed," said the Irish policeman; "the poor fellow had neither coat nor hat."

On the church-door at Ludford, in Hertfordshire, it is stated that the following notice lately appeared: "This is to give notice, that no person is to be buried in this churchyard but those living in the parish; and those who wish to be buried are desired to apply to the parish-clerk."

In a Liverpool paper, March 29, 1842, a trial at the assizes is reported, touching manorial rights in Manchester. "Sir Oswald Mosley *v.* Mr. James Bird. The declaration set forth that the plaintiff was possessed of a market which was to be holden on *Tuesday, Thursday, or Saturday*, except Christmas-day or Good *Friday* should occur on *either of those days*." A very mess of blunders, alleged to be set forth in a legal document.

An Irish paper, describing the result of a duel, says, "The one party was wounded in the chest, and the other fired in the air." Who hit the wounded man does not appear.

Blayney said, in reference to several persons, all relations to each other, but who happened to

have no descendants, that "it seemed to be hereditary in their family to have no children."

Scores of blunders in all countries arise from mere confusion of ideas, and some from long desuetude of ordinary expressions.

The English husbandman, entertaining a few humble neighbours to tea one Sunday afternoon, and wishing to make them feel perfectly at home, said, "Come, come, help yourselves, and make *welcome*; you are very *free*." The laugh caused by this unintentional transposition of two friendly words, induced his wife to apologise for her good man, which she did in a way not at all mending the matter. "Oh!" said she, "never mind what he says, for he always speaks as he thinks." This redoubled the merriment, for, besides making such a blunder in merely pleading his habit of speaking without thinking accurately, she had given the oddest possible reason for his not being heeded.

In the hospitalities of the humble, it is often considered a blunder (and it looks like one) for the host or hostess to say, "Do join us at our homely meal;" or, "Do take a little more—there is more than *we* shall eat." In one sense this might indicate that the invited party might

not be welcome but for the accidental abundance ; but, it may be asked, is it not genuine, though abruptly expressed politeness ? Does it not remove all sense of encroachment or privation, thus putting the party at his entire ease ? And is not this the very essence of politeness ?

The observation may be permitted in reference to the common blunders which occur in the ordinary conversation, and even in the public speeches of some clever men, that they are very pardonable, and much to be preferred to the stiff, cold, set phraseology, which less talented people, fearful of error, adopt, for the sake of securing critical precision. Mr. and Miss Edgeworth urge that "It would, indeed, be an intolerable restraint upon social intercourse, if every man were subject to be taxed for each inaccuracy of language—if he were compelled to talk upon all occasions as if he were answerable to a star-chamber of criticism and surrounded by informers." True ; we may afford to be indulgent to verbal or grammatical faults when a person is dwelling ably on his subject, arguing convincingly, instructing his hearers, amusing his friends, and promoting the humanities. What signifies, in such a case, the occasional forgetfulness of the nominative, and the

use of a plural instead of a singular verb, or the transposition of a word? Far more agreeable, with all its faults, is the language of sincerity and right principle than the oratory of a certain M.P., whom I well remember, who always spoke, as it were, in print. He—was—so—ve—ry—pre—cise, and rrejoiced in such a—half—drrawl—ing—and—half—staccato—style—of—speech: he—was—so—de—li—ber—rate, and—so—pains—ta—king, that—you—would—rrather—be—in—a—boat—bump—ing—on—the—peb—bles—of—a—shal—low—lake—than—lis—ten—ing—to—the—perr—fect—ly—ac—cu—rrate—grra—vel—ling—grra—vel—ling—graa—vel—ling—of—the—pomp—ous man.

One of the strangest blunders that ever occurred within my own hearing, and for the truth of which I can vouch, is the following, and it is Irish:—A friend of mine was well known as a philanthropic character; and whilst I was standing in his open office one day, a youngish man entered, whose clothes were of a fashionable cut, but far worn. His appearance was that of an educated man, much reduced, and his coat, buttoned up to the throat, betrayed nothing in the shape of linen. With a certain boldness of air,

and not assuming the humble accents of the common beggar, though courteous withal, he stated his temporarily distressed condition, dwelt on the reputation of the kind "gintleman," and intimated that a "thrifle" of relief would be most "wilcome," as he was on his return to his native place. My friend told him the Strangers' Friend Society would assist him to a passage to Ireland.

"Oh, sor !" he exclaimed, "I'm not an Irishman, at all, at all !—it's quite a mistake your honour's making."

"Don't say so," said my friend, "your accent would betray you any where, at least to a practised ear ; and as you are no worse for being an Irishman, don't deny it : it will look like a trick, and damage your interest with those who might relieve you."

"Oh, indeed, sor," said he ; "upon my honour, now, I'm a raal Englishman, born in London itself, and niver was in Ireland till a few days lately, and I'm going back to my frinds in the metropolis, if I can only get the mains."

My friend persisted in his opinion that the applicant was a Hibernian ; indeed, there could be no mistake about the matter, and I was wondering what turn the dispute would take, when, as a last

effort to convince, and to establish his veracity, the man exclaimed, "But maybe you're deceived by what I'm going to mention. I was in a large mercantile concern in London for many years, where they did a deal of business with Ireland; and, as I was correspondin' clerk, maybe I caught the brogue that way."

Such a defence as this hardly any but an Irishman could have conceived the idea of setting up; but he was "one of ten thousand," for he had denied his country for the sake of evading some apprehended prejudice.

But even the grand blunder quoted by Lord Orford as the primest of bulls, involving a man's doubt of his own identity (he believing he had been changed at nurse), will, I think, be quite equalled by the point in the following story.

A jovial, good-humoured, and industrious commercial traveller, a native of the Green Isle, though he felt much fatigued by a hard day's duty in a country town, resolved, whilst enjoying his evening glass at the fire-side of the inn, that, deep winter as it was, he would make an early stage in the morning, by a coach passing through the place, and which would reach his next scene of business by breakfast time. He named this pro-

ject in presence of several of his brethren of the road, and gave orders to "boots" to call him just in time for the coach, and no sooner, as he would make his toilet in the next town, where he should arrive by daylight. Having paid his bill, and feeling that all was comfortably settled, he sat till rather a late hour in the warm room, where the fumes of a cigar or two from his neighbours probably contributed to his dropping fast asleep. Some of the party, taking advantage of his condition, carefully blacked his face. By and by, he became wakeful enough (though still very drowsy) to find his way to bed. In the morning, "boots" awoke him exactly in time, and hastily huddling on his clothes, he was soon in the coach, where, darkness being still around, he was soon again asleep.

In a couple of hours the coach pulled up at the inn, and he was shewn, in the grey light, and with candles still visible here and there, into the gloomy breakfast-room, where, after gaping and stretching, he took up a candle, that he might look at himself in the glass, and turn up the hair from his forehead, when, utterly astounded at the black and unknown visage he there beheld, he shouted out lustily, and in a

tone of sudden alarm, "Why, by the powers, if 'boots' hasn't wakened the wrong man!"

I have no parallel to this, or, at least, any that is so ludicrous in the description. Our nursery-rhymes afford some approach to it in the well-known versified story,—

" There was a little woman, as I've heard tell,
She went to the market, her eggs for to sell."

It is but "justice to Ireland" to observe, that if there is any class of blunder more perseveringly attributed to the Irish than another, it is that numerous class which arises from incongruity. Every thing incongruous must be Paddy's. This is a mistake. I think I have shewn that errors of all kinds *but one* originate in all countries. To the common stock Ireland, no doubt, contributes her share; nay, I can afford to say on her behalf, she is liberal in her contributions, owing to the impetuosity already discoursed upon as one of her characteristics, and which is a generous quality in her temperament, not denied by any writer. But the blunders she commits, in common with other nations, are not genuine Irish bulls. The Edinburgh Reviewers well remark, "It is clear that a bull

cannot depend upon mere incongruity." Certainly not. Incongruity may be the parent of the ludicrous, whether in appearances or expressions, especially if modified, as suggested by Dr. Beattie, who says, "The objects of the ludicrous are incongruities, combined with a certain degree of congruity. A butcher, seated in the pit of the theatre, being overheated, took off his wig, that he might wipe his forehead, and, apparently unconscious of the effect, he placed his wig for the moment on the head of his dog, which sat by his side. Garrick, who was performing, casting his eye on the dog, was so tickled by its appearance that he was obliged to run behind the scenes, that he might laugh outright. Here was a combination of the incongruous with the congruous. The wig was on a *head*, though not of the usual kind, and hence Garrick's laughter. Had the butcher hung it on the stick in his hand, the incident would probably have attracted no notice.

I have no doubt that the plea of Mr. and Miss Edgeworth, just alluded to, that English is a foreign language to the natives of Ireland, will be valid in accounting for many expressions which seem to us incongruous, and to arise from con-

found it more with persons in their own language. The Irish have always directly leading to what appears as almost a *lingua*. And, at the same time, we are not to overlook the common interests of our own people, who tell us, they "never have no common law, which wages is so low and potatoes is so dear." Certainly Paddy's own ignorance, or his inexperience, or his carelessness, or all combined, lead him frequently into inaccuracies. On a highway, he will call to his friends on the rough foot-path, "Oh, come here—sure the middle's the best side!" Speaking of persons in an apartment, he will say, "There is not a man in the room except two women!"

A London newspaper some years ago informed its readers, that "an additional number of sentinels is to be placed in Hyde Park, to prevent the robberies which happened last winter."

"I never shot a bird in my life," said some one to his friend; who replied, "For my part, I never shot any thing in the shape of a bird, except a squirrel, which I killed with a stone, when it fell into the river and was drowned."

A clergyman is somewhere described as preaching a sermon for the blind, when, expatiating on

the blessings conferred by the precious visual organs, he exclaimed, "If all were born blind, what a shocking sight it would be!"

An Irish doctor, we are told, advertised that persons afflicted with deafness might hear of him at a house in Liffey Street, where also blind patients might see him daily, from ten till three o'clock.

The Irish girl told her forbidden lover she was longing to possess his portrait, and intended to obtain it.

"But how if your friends see it?" inquired he.

"Ah, but I'll tell the artist not to make it like you, so they won't know it."

An Irish gentleman having a pair of new boots sent home to him, proceeded to try them on; but, after a great deal of labour, and pulling and straining, till, from the blisters on his hands, he could no longer continue the violent exertion, he desisted, declaring that he perceived very clearly that he should never get those boots on "till he had worn them a day or two!"

To clinch an argument, which an event is expected to do, Paddy will sometimes exclaim, "Well, you'll see—just wait till a while ago." And the celebrated bell-man is described as giving his

awful warning on the eve of the 5th of November, in the following words :—

“ This is the night, I speak it with great sorrow,
That we were all t’hav bin blown up to-morrow ;
Therefore take care of fire and candle light —
It’s a cowl’d frosty mornin’, and so good night.”

But, perhaps, the best concentrated specimen of blunders, such as occur in all nations, but which, of course, are fathered upon Paddy, wholesale, as if by common consent, is the following. It has afforded me and my friends many a hearty laugh, especially when there has been a keen look-out for all the best points, which are by no means the most obvious at first sight :—

*Copy of a Letter, written during the Rebellion by
Sir — —, an Irish Member of Parliament,
to his friend in London.*

MY DEAR SIR,

Having now a little peace and quietness, I sit down to inform you of the dreadful bustle and confusion we are in from these blood-thirsty rebels, most of whom are (thank God !) killed and dispersed. We are in a pretty mess, can

get nothing to eat, nor wine to drink, except whisky; and when we sit down to dinner we are obliged to keep both hands armed. Whilst I write this, I hold a sword in each hand and a pistol in the other. I concluded from the beginning that this would be the end of it, and I see I was right, for it is not half over yet. At present there are such goings on that every thing is at a stand still. I should have answered your letter a fortnight ago, but I did not receive it till this morning. Indeed, scarcely a mail arrives safe without being robbed. No longer ago than yesterday the coach with the mails from Dublin was robbed near this town; the bags had been judiciously left behind for fear of accident, and by good luck there was nobody in it but two outside passengers, who had nothing for the thieves to take. Last Thursday notice was given that a gang of rebels was advancing here under the French standard, but they had no colours, nor any drums except bagpipes. Immediately every man in the place, including women and children, ran out to meet them. We soon found our force much too little; we were far too near to think of retreating. Death was in every face, but to it we went, and, by the time half our little party were

killed, we began to be all alive again. Fortunately the rebels had no guns, except pistols, cutlasses, and pikes, and as we had plenty of muskets and ammunition, we put them all to the sword. Not a soul of them escaped, except some that were drowned in an adjacent bog ; and, in a very short time, nothing was to be heard but silence. Their uniforms were all different colours, but mostly green. After the action we went to rummage a sort of camp, which they had left behind them. All we found was a few pikes, without heads, a parcel of empty bottles full of water, and and a bundle of French commissions filled up with Irish names. Troops are now stationed all round the country, which exactly squares with my ideas.

I have only time to add that I am in great haste.

Yours truly,

P.S. If you do not receive this, of course it must have miscarried, therefore I beg you will write to let me know.

CHAPTER X.

IRISH HUMOUR.

HUMOUR is of various kinds. It is of itself totally distinct from wit, though often found in alliance with it, and it may be extremely agreeable or disagreeable. Humour may be displayed by a person who is altogether destitute of wit, properly so called, and yet it may amuse; it may consist in odd grimace, or quaint turns, or the repetition of laughable stories with fixed, serious, Listonian countenance. There is ill-humour too, and good-humour, and the humour for perpetual contradiction or hypercriticism.

Some men have the humour of holding you by the button when you meet them, and they keep you in custody till they can perpetrate *something*, which, however stupid, induces you to laugh, and then they march off crowingly. But, of all people I have ever been amongst, the Irish have the

particular vein of humour which I deem best worthy of notice, because it is the most lively, innocent, and mirth-provoking.

One definition of humour might be given in saying, that the prevailing disposition of a person, whatever that disposition may be, if it manifest itself with a frequency and excess which become characteristic, is the humour of that person; and to the honour of the Irish be it said, *their* humour is very pleasant, because it is of a mirthful kind. It exhibits itself to a stranger in all cases of inquiry or of casual observation, through a determination, on the part of an Irishman or Irishwoman, to say something, promptly, *to the point*, or *about the point*, or even *off the point*: it is of little consequence which. On asking questions in Ireland, we never meet with a yawning "don't know," "can't tell," "never noticed." An *answer* we are sure to have, whether such as was expected or not; and, in many cases, it will be piquant and memorable.

It must have struck many observers that Irishmen, of the humbler classes, frequently wear massive greatcoats, with ample capes, even in very warm weather; and that Irishwomen are, in like fashion, often enveloped in heavy cloaks, though

their heads or feet may be uncovered. One bright and burning day in June, I was remarking on this circumstance whilst walking with an English friend in Dublin, and I expressed the wish that some opportunity might occur for our asking some of the women who were passing what their motive could be for thus encumbering their persons during such glowing weather. Immediately after this observation, I left my friend on the broad footway of the street, whilst I stepped into a merchant's counting-house on business. On returning, I found my friend rubbing his hands, and, in a half-grumbling, half-laughing way, he assured me he should adopt no more of my suggestions. For a moment I could not recall the subject to which he referred, but he went on to explain. "I saw," said he, "two decent-looking women coming along, whilst I stood waiting for you, and I spread forth my hands to signify that I had something to say. This stopped them, and I said, 'My good-looking women, do tell me why, in such a beautiful hot summer day, you have thrown over you those ugly heavy cloaks? Excuse me, I am an Englishman, and really to my eyes it seems as if you might not be very nice and tidy beneath your cloaks; why don't you leave them off in

summer." "One of the women, imagine the other, and looking in in my face and smiling, said, 'Sure, we are all at home this morning in the sister living is a great business.' I was in to this day in the business," said my friend. "And was that all that was in my business with a business? But you may not see business in your business another time." I business business the business, and business not business business business in many business, but if business the only answer to his business would have been, "What's that to you?" or, "Mind your own business," accompanied by a business look, a business of the head, and a business business by.

At business, a gentleman asking among the business-drivers for "Irish Jenny," was met by a smiling persuasive look from a female owner of long-eared quadrupeds, who said, dropping a curtsy, "And won't 'Irish Nelly' do as well?"

A gentleman who was on a tour, attended by an Irish servant-man, who drove the vehicle, and had charge of the petty cash for road disbursements, was several times puzzled with the appearance of a charge in the man's daily account, entered as "Refreshment for the horse, 2d;" and again, "Refreshment for horse, 2d." At length

being of opinion that such an item ought to have been included in the general bills at the different inns, all of which he paid himself, he asked Dennis about it. "Och! sure," said he, "it's whipcord it is!"

A fashionable Irish gentleman, driving a good deal about Cheltenham, was observed to have the not very graceful habit of lolling his tongue out as he went along. Curran, who was there, was asked what he thought could be his countryman's motive for giving the instrument of eloquence such an airing. "Oh!" said he, "he's trying to catch the English accent."

The well-known Roman curse is one of the bitterest imprecations that can gush from the lips of a vengeful but disappointed and powerless foe. "May you survive your kindred and friends!" It is awfully and comprehensively malignant; it bespeaks, for an enemy, length of life—a long, long existence; but that existence rendered unspeakably miserable by the loss of all natural and social ties, and all delightful recognitions. And there is a Spanish complimentary wish, a benediction indeed, presenting at once a parallel and a contrast to this: "May your Excellency live a thousand years!" It is a parallel in the idea

of duration ; a contrast in its intention and spirit ; length of life being assumed to be of itself a blessing, and no privation of its charms being for a moment contemplated. But there is a climax to both these aspirations, something which far overtops them, furnished by the witty humour of an Irishman.

It is related of Sir Walter Scott, that, when in Ireland, he had occasion to give sixpence to a poor man for opening a gate, or some such passing service, and finding, after much search amongst his silver, that he had nothing less than a shilling, he handed it to the man, with the observation, " I only intended to give you half this sum, and therefore remember you owe me sixpence."

Murphy's instant reply was, " Oh ! bless your honour ! May you live till I pay you ! " Here was a wish for Sir Walter, an aspiration for his longevity, far exceeding the scope of either the Roman malediction or the Spanish blessing. A thousand years are as nothing to it.

And it was a humorous association of ideas which was evinced by a beggar-woman on a very different occasion. She had pathetically implored alms from a lusty gentleman, who was hobbling

along, in evident pain from his swollen and gouty feet; but her repeated entreaties were of no avail. He waved his hand in token of all refusal, when she calmly exclaimed, as she turned away, "Indeed I wish his heart was as tinder as his toes!"

The Irish player gave a ready and humorous turn to the feeling in which he and his manager were involved, when the latter evinced some disappointment at the former declaring himself totally unable to play the part of Henry VIII. "Why you can play almost anything and everything, and yet won't undertake that one part of King Henry VIII.?"

"No, indeed," replied the actor, "I can't; but I'll tell you what I'll do for you—I'll play the two parts of Henry IV. and that will be aequal."

English tourists in Ireland soon discover that the length of Irish miles constantly recurs to their observation; eleven Irish miles being equal to about fourteen English. A stranger one day complained of the barbarous condition of the road in a particular district; "True," said a native, "but if the quality of it be rather infairior, we give good measure of it, any how."

When it was proposed to adopt the English measure of miles in Ireland, it was humorously objected that it would so increase the distance between the towns, that travellers must rise earlier in the morning to perform their journeys.

The Irish gardener, in whose presence his master had been remarking upon the genial weather so beautifully adapted to their operations, joined in a grateful expression on the subject, and exclaimed, "Indeed, master, it *is* iligant weather, sure enough. Your honour couldn't have made it better yourself, if you had had the sun in one hand, and the watering can in the other." This bold use of the figurative stamps the anecdote as Irish.

Paddy being asked if he thought of doing something, which, for his own part, he deemed very unlikely, he said he should "as soon think of attempting to light a cigar at a pump."

It is well said by Mr. and Miss Edgeworth, that "in Ireland the countenance and heart expand at the approach of wit and humour; the poorest labourer forgets his poverty and toil in the pleasure of enjoying a joke;" and we may safely add that the spirit of *fun* is sometimes so rampant in the breast of an Irishman, that it

neutralises all sense of personal danger, as indeed may be instanced in the really "striking" frolics of Donnybrook fair. But another kind of proof occurs to me at this moment.

Two gentlemen in Dublin had hired a two-wheeled open car, such as is called, from its bowl-like form, an inside car, to convey them to their hotel. The driver soon attained the accustomed speed by using the customary *arguments* to his beast, but he was observed to pay quite as much attention to something below him as to his poor locomotive quadruped. He was every moment looking forward and whipping, and then looking down again over his right shoulder; this he continued with great energy and glee all the way. When the party had alighted and paid their fare, Paddy "trusted their honours would afford him a thrifle beyant the fare, especially as he had something to tell them that was worth the knowin'." After a little refusing, and a little bantering, and indulging some curiosity to know the "sacret," they conceded the additional trifle.

"And, now, what is it?" they inquired.

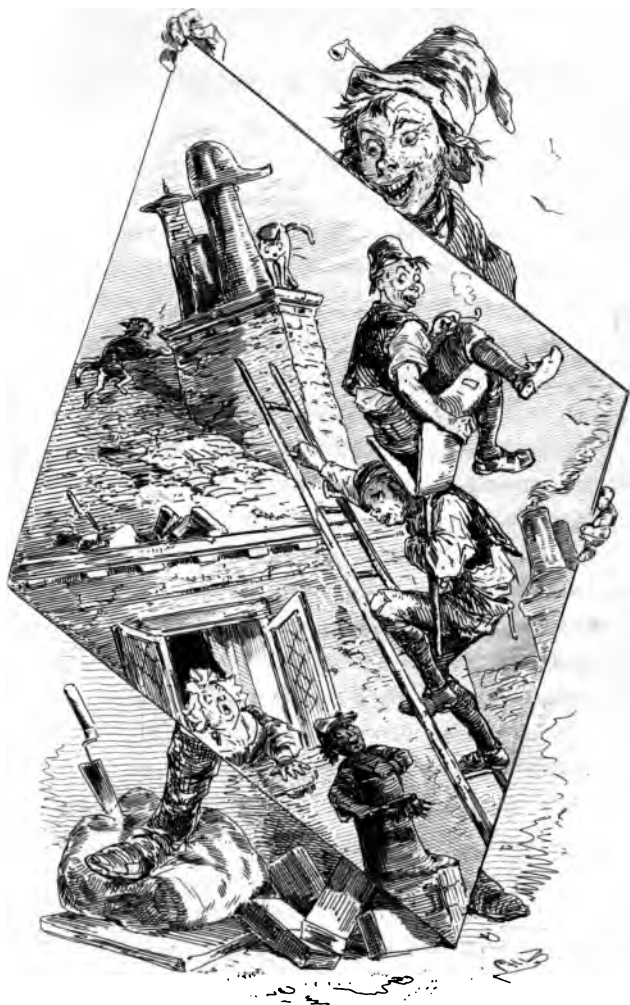
"And, sure, your honours, it's I that deserves an extra glass, any how, for there's not another boy in all ould Ireland that could ha' druv ye, as

I done, and at such a rate, for a mile and a quarter over the hard stones, *without a linch-pin!*”

As the penny-a-liners would say, “the feelings of the gentlemen,” on finding they had been rewarding a thoughtless wag, who had been risking their necks and his own too, “may be more easily conceived than described.”

A similar instance of strange recklessness was manifested by Terence, the bricklayer’s labourer. He had disputed a good deal with a fellow-workman about their relative strength; and at last laid a wager of a shilling, that the latter could not carry him in his hod up to the roof of the house which they were busy repairing. Terence, whilst taking a glass with a friend in the evening, described his disappointment and the loss of his money in these words:—

“I was soon snugly sated in his hod; the hod was soon on his showlder, and up we goes, step after step; hard work it was, too, I could persave that; but stiddy as time, we mounted to the third story, and here, to be sure, he shook and tottered, and the ladder fairly trimbled agin, and I *was in hopes* he’d ha’ bin down, pell-mèll; but by my faith, he rallied bravely and took fresh courage, and in a few jiffies he tossed me on the



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slates, the raw-boned varmint ! and I lost my thirteener* out and out : but sure I had a good laugh about the fright he was in."

And not only in danger, but under the endurance of suffering, Irishmen will have their jokes, if possible. One of them was toiling, toiling, toiling, on the treadmill with others, whose looks were as joyless and dim as the walls of their prison, when he exclaimed :—

"And sure this is such a staircase as I never knowed the likes of afoore ; I've been climbing up ever so long, step after step, and I haven't raiched the first chamber dooar yet."

The almost instinctive epigrammatic sharpness of Irish humour is a characteristic often noticed. An instance of it is given in Sir Jonah Barrington's "Memoirs," in the case of a quarrelsome, fashionable, fighting bully, who is suddenly reported to a convivial company as being killed, having been just shot dead in a duel.

"Shot, is he ?" exclaimed one of the party, "then, by my word, he has died a natural death."

The haymaker, who had crossed the Channel in search of work, was refused employment, because,

* The old name for an English shilling, which was formerly equal in value to thirteen Irish pennies.

as the farmer told him, he was of too low a stature for the job ; he did not consider him tall enough.

“ What ! then,” exclaimed the man, “ do you cut the hay at the top, in this country ? ”

Curran, when Master of the Rolls in Ireland, was going, one day, to a levee at the Castle. There was a great press of carriages ; when, all at once, he was startled by the pole of the carriage which followed him crashing through the back of his. He hastily put his head out of the window, crying to his coachman :—

“ Holloa ! look out here ! the pole of the carriage behind is driven into us.”

“ Arrah, then, it’s all right, again, your honour,” said Pat, exultingly, “ for I’ve just druv my pole into the carriage before.”

Paddy, we are all aware, has seldom been accused of pecuniary thriftiness, but sometimes poverty of pocket may stimulate him to financial conceptions, for there is an old adage, that Necessity is the maternal parent of Invention ; and certainly some few instances of “ an eye to the main chance ” have been observable in him, though they may be “ few and far between.” The Irish traveller is well remembered, who, on

the coach stopping, about noon-day, at a roadside inn, where refreshments were prepared, inquired the charge for dinner.

“Half-a-crown,” was the reply.

“And what for supper?”

“Eighteen-pence.”

“Then bring me a supper immediately, Mr. Waither.”

An Irish student in the University of Edinburgh, waited upon a celebrated teacher of the German flute to know his terms :—

“Two guineas for the first month, and one guinea for the second and succeeding months.”

“Oh, very well, then, I’ll come the second month.”

And there is another instance, which is of genuine Irish origin, though, with shame be it spoken, it has been subjected to a Transatlantic appropriation. Here it is, as dressed up by Jonathan :—

“A Yankee went into the bar of an inn in a country town, ‘Pray, what’s the price of a pint of shrub?’

“‘Half-a-dollar,’ was the reply of the man at the bar.

“‘Well, then, give it me.’

"The shrub was poured out, when the bell rang for dinner.

" 'Is that your dinner-bell ?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'What may you charge for dinner ?'

" 'Half-a-dollar.'

" 'Well, then, I think I had better not take the shrub, but have some dinner instead.'

"This was consented to. The Yankee went in, sat down to his dinner, and when it was over, was about going out of the door without paying.

" 'Massa,' said the negro waiter, 'you not paid for your dinner.'

" 'I know that; I took the dinner instead of the shrub.'

" 'But, massa, you not pay for the shrub.'

" 'Well, I did not have the shrub; did I, you nigger?' said the Yankee, walking away.

"The negro scratched his head; he knew that something was wrong, as he had got no money; but he could not make it out till the Yankee was out of sight."

Now, I must seize this stolen or runaway bantling, and restore it to its native land. Jonathan has his own kind of humour, but this is not

of his growth ; and though I must admit he has dressed it extremely well, he ought, by all means, to repudiate it.

An Irishman went into one of those shops in his own country, wherein every thing suitable for the outer or inner man may be found ; the drapery on one side ; the bread, bacon, and groceries on the other ; and beyond a lofty pile of empty tea-chests (placed there accidentally, on purpose,) forming a nice screen, there is stored an abundant supply of the “ cratur.”

On his first entrance, he said he should like a twopenny loaf, which was accordingly placed before him. As if suddenly changing his mind, he declared he should prefer two pen’orth of whisky instead. This he drank off, and pushing the loaf towards the shopkeeper, was departing, when demand of payment was made for the whisky.

“ Sure, and haven’t I given ye the loaf for the whisky ? ”

“ Well, but you did not pay for the loaf, you know.”

“ Thru, and why should I ? don’t you see, I didn’t take the loaf, man alive ! ” And away he quietly walked, leaving the worthy dealer lost in a brown study.

This, as an Irish specimen, may be said to be of a mixed character: one of the parties being wide awake, like an Irishman, the other in a sleepy state—an exception to the rule, decidedly, if, indeed, the shopkeeper were an Irishman, for, after all, this is not alleged in the story.

Touching the word “cratur,” which occurs in this anecdote, (and which used to be familiar to all Irishmen, though it is not nearly so frequently in their mouths since Father Mathew has set another fashion,) it might be no stretch of authority to insist that it is derived from “crater,” a cup: “to take a drop of the cratur” surely means to drink of the cup; and the burning strength of the whisky clearly identifies it with a volcanic signification. There seems, too, to be a “chemical affinity” between different kinds of pledges in Ireland: inasmuch, as most of the poor people who take one pledge from Father Mathew soon take many more pledges from the pawnbrokers.

We are sometimes amused at large exceptions being made with great *naïveté*, in assertions that are at first given without due qualification:—

“Oh! thank you, I am very well indeed; only I have got a severe cold just now.”

“We had a delightful field-day, I assure you,

except that we were wet to the skin by the torrents of rain one-half the time."

We have heard of the play of "Hamlet" being announced by an incomplete company at a country barn, "with the part of the Prince of Denmark omitted, by particular desire;" but the Irish exception is as good as any.

"Do come and dine with me," said the Englishman: "you must; though I have only a nice piece of beef and some potatoes for you."

"Oh! my dear fellow! don't make the laist apology about the dinner, it's the very same I should have had at home, barrin' the beef."

Humour is perceptible in Ireland, even among children at play.

"Barney, come here, I say; come along wid ye," said one playfellow to another.

"No, I'll not come."

"Come, I tell ye, ye shall come."

"I won't."

"But ye shall; come, come, I say."

"I'll just tell ye what," said Barney, "the more ye call, the more I won't come."

It was merely the prevailing spirit of humour which prompted the medical examiners in Dublin to ask a student what he thought he should do, if

a man were to be blown up into the air by an explosion, in his presence ; and it was a similar spirit which dictated the ready answer :—

“ Why, gentlemen, I would wait till he came down again.”

How frequently it is observable, that when a wreck, or a steam-boat explosion has occurred on any of our shores, there is a general desertion by the public of all pleasure trips in that neighbourhood. The feeling of panic and insecurity, indeed, is such, that some men of business are disposed to defer the period of an intended voyage.

The Hibernian, however, looks at the affair under a different aspect. “ Pray, bookkeeper, have any of your staim-packets been blown up lately ?”

“ Oh ! no, sir ; we have had nothing of the kind these two years.”

“ Indeed, then, I won’t be after taking my place for England just yet ; if it’s been so long a coming, your turn must be gittin’ near. Tell me the day after you’ve had a blowin’ up, and I’ll be off immadiately, for you’ll not be having a thing of that kind two days together, any how.”

What actuary of an Insurance Company could

gainsay Paddy's doctrine, according to the laws of average and of chances ?

The question has sometimes arisen, whether the Irish are prone to punning ; whether the pun be one of the characteristics of their wit, or their humour. My opinion is that their estimate of the mere pun is the usual one, namely, that however startling and agreeable it may be on some rare occasions, it still takes inferior rank as a species of wit, and that they do not pursue it for its own sake, but sometimes engage it as an auxiliary to a humorous turn, involving something *beyond* the pun.

The ferryman, whilst plying over a water which was only slightly agitated, was asked by a timid lady in his boat, whether any persons were ever lost in that river. " Oh, no," said he, " we always finds 'em agin, the next day." Here, by implication, there is a pun on the word *lost*; but I suspect the answer is quite as much a play upon the inquirer's fears as upon the terms of the question.

An Irish gentleman, parting with a lazy servant-woman, was asked with respect to her industry, whether she was what is termed afraid of work. " Oh ! not at all," said he, " not at all ; she'll

frequently lie down and fall asleep by the very side of it."

When the apprentice sailor-boy fell from the round-top to the deck, stunned, but little hurt, the captain exclaimed in surprise, "Why, where did you come from?"

"From the North of Ireland, your honour," was the prompt reply; as the poor fellow gathered himself up, uttering a ready *équivoque* on the words "come from."

Murphy was asked how it was so difficult to waken him in a morning: "Indeed, master, it's because of your own advice, always to attend to what I'm about; so whenever I sleeps I pays attintion to it."

And it was a strange instance of alleged obedience to orders in the case of a father's will,—a new reading, as it were,—which a brute of a fellow displayed in turning his younger brother out-of-doors. He was vociferously remonstrated with by the neighbours on the gross impropriety of such conduct. "Sure," said he, "it's the will; I'm ordered to divide the house betune myself and my brother, so I've taken the inside and given him the outside."

"Now, waiter," said a hungry party of plea-

sure in Ireland, ordering dinner at a country inn, "Now, see that we have every thing nice; and especially let us have some game."

"By my troth, gentlemen," replied the attendant, "we've never any game in these parts, except what we makes of one another."

When the parties to a duel were on the appointed spot, and preparations were being made to give effect to the arrangement for "honourable satisfaction," it was suggested to the seconds that an attempt to save life ought to be made; in fact, that the disputants should be made to shake hands. "Oh!" replied an Irish officer, who was one of the seconds, "that is quite unnecessary; their hands have been shaking this half hour: that I'll swear."

In a very different scene, a quiz of a fellow called out, "Larry, what do you call potatoes in this part of Ireland?"

"Oh! indeed, master, we don't call them at all, at all; we just goes and fitches 'em when we wants 'em,—that is, if we can get 'em."

Here are puns undoubtedly, but I should say not sought or hit upon, merely as such, but to give point to a playful effort of the characteristic humour of Ireland, when it takes an unexpected

flight,—a sort of fanciful elopement, as it were,—with the idea suddenly suggested by a question.

In the course of a changeful winter, a sudden and very severe frost enabled the dealers in ice and iced articles to obtain a goodly supply of the important but perishable crystal, which it was an object of anxiety to secure from any immediate return of thaw. An Irish confectioner was, accordingly, busily and lustily shovelling into his cellars a valuable load or two, during a dismal and doubtful cold day, when a neighbour made a remark on the bustle he was in: “Yes, indeed,” was the reply; “you see I’m after making hay while the sun shines.”

An Irish peasant, on a small ragged pony, was floundering through a bog, when the animal in its efforts to push on, got one of its hoofs into the stirrups, “Arrah, my boy,” said the rider, “if *you* are going to get up, it is time for *me* to get down.”

And it was a piquant sally of humour by which the Irish lady, in company, retorted the sarcasm of an English lady, who, half-jocularly of course, attributed a very polite readiness for wine to the daughters of Erin. “I believe that in Ireland,” she observed, “it is quite customary for a lady,

if she only catches the eye of a gentleman earnestly directed to her at dinner-table to say, 'Port, if you please.' Promptitude is the order of the day."

"Yes," replied the Irish lady, not overpleased with the insinuation, and determined to repay it with interest, "and the promptitude takes another direction in your country."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, when an English lady finds a gentleman's eye upon *her* at table, I understand she averts her countenance, and, blushing, says in her gentlest tone, 'You must ask papa.'"

CHAPTER XI.

ENGLISH HUMOUR.

It may be doubted whether England can boast of any large amount of genuine humour among her sons ; it is, at all events, a quality not much indulged in ; yet it certainly exists. In the bar-parlours of taverns it sometimes excites peals of laughter ; the excitement of the nut-brown ale, and the liberty which one person is allowed to take with another in promotion of familiar amusement, in such scenes, will sometimes generate sallies of humour, not many of which, however, are recorded.

Justly or not, Lancashire and Yorkshire are considered the region in which, more than in any other, English humour prevails. In Dr. Collyer's "Tim Bobbin," as well as in other local works, illustrative of dialects, much true humour is displayed. But it reigns almost exclusively among

the very humblest classes : in rare exceptions only does it reach the middle and higher circles of society ; and in all its forms it differs greatly from the Irish. There is often a spice of practical mischief in it, and it is, at times, attended with the design of obtaining by its exercise some selfish advantage or gratification.

A traveller, arriving late at an inn, and having sent his horse round to the stable, found the snug bar-parlour so filled with company that every seat was occupied ; it was the room he preferred sitting in ; it was there he had often heard the gossip of the little town, and he saw several persons whose cheerful faces, added to the charms of a ruddy fire, made him determine to find a seat by dislodging, if possible, one or more of the less familiar parties present from their snug quarters. While taking off his wrappering, he called aloud to the waiter,—

“Tell the ostler to give my horse a couple of scores of oysters immediately.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Oysters for a horse!” muttered two or three of those to whom the traveller had *not* given a side wink. “Oysters for a horse! well, that *is* something new, however ; we must go and see.”

They did so, and our friend won the chimney-corner. In a few moments the waiter came to apprise him that the horse would not touch the oysters; he had not cracked a single shell.

"Then bring them to me," replied the traveller, "and I'll eat them."

Of course the unseated guests shortly returned, also; but one of them had only the alternative of standing at the door or retiring, as the company would not hear of "the stranger" just arrived being disturbed from his position.

In the town of Bolton a species of humour was, for many years, indulged in by a number of tradesmen who had leisure enough to spend some hours a-day at taverns, the exercise of which humour became known by the name of Bolton trotting. The word "trotting" might, perhaps, be rendered "tricking," or "trapping," for the jokes had generally the practical effect, or at least, such was their object, of obtaining glasses round from some "victim," or of punishing a party against whom some feeling of dislike existed.

It was a very common trick, when a stranger dropped in amongst the "trotters," whose favourite resort was the bar of the Swan Inn, that his black coat should be alluded to as very handsome,

a good fit, &c., but it would be termed of some other colour by the speaker—say blue. The stranger would remind him that he meant black. Oh, no: it was blue, decidedly, or his eyes were strangely deceived. The dispute would be kept up, till the “trotter” would bet glasses round it was blue. Frequently the stranger would accept so safe a wager, and the decision was, of course, left to the company; the coat was shown round, and the betting parties retired for a moment. Of eleven persons present, six would vote that it was blue; the chairman announced the result to the stranger, when he and his opponent returned to hear it, and of course he had *to pay* the shot: but he was comforted by the assurance, “that it was only so decided by a majority of *one*, so that they had brought him in *decent* anyhow.” Like wagers, and like decisions, were frequently made, when a stranger, coming in during a shower, would be accosted about the dryness of the weather; his assertions as to rain would be disputed, and a wager proposed; and a verdict equally “decent” with the foregoing would afford the “trotters” a glass at the expense of the novitiate.

The “trotters” had one day a traveller amongst

them, whom they drew into conversation about the power of the human body to endure heat. The recent exhibition of an itinerant "fire-king," or "fire-eater," assisted the discussion : when, at length, the stranger spoke slightly of some of the exhibitor's tricks, and came out with a boast respecting his own powers in handling hot articles, or bearing the effect of heat on his skin. It was immediately suggested that some experiment should be made, and one of the company, "just for the good of the house," proposed to bet the stranger glasses round as to which of the two could longest bear to keep his leg in a pail of hot water. This being agreed to, a couple of pails of steaming water were had in, and the hardy rivals each immersed a limb, stocking and all, to abide the result. The contortions of countenance betrayed by each—the writhing agony depicted in their looks and movements—the half-suppressed vocal intimations of pain—afforded, for some minutes, intense amusement to the company ; till, at last, the stranger gave in hastily, drew his par-boiled leg from the scalding vessel, and manfully submitted to the "penalty of the bond ;" the zest in the enjoyment of which was by no means lessened to the "trotters" by the victorious party



Fiasco in Hot Water.

THE CARICATURIST.

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resuming a most placid countenance, and deliberately raising his well-shaped *cork* leg, dripping from its hurtless bath.

One evening the company having no stranger to play upon, selected a neighbour, whose volubility of tongue was not always agreeable to them. He laboured under that annoying disease, a determination of words to the mouth; and as he was not one of the initiated, they had no objection to victimise him to the extent of glasses round. Taunting him for a time upon his proneness to perpetual chattering, a charge which he loquaciously, pertinaciously, most fluently denied, the usual challenge for a wager was given, on the accusation that he could not sit five minutes in the company without speaking. This he agreed to test; it being stipulated, on the one hand, that conversation should go on as usual in the room, but none of the party were to speak to or touch him, with a view to extort any reply or exclamation; on the other hand, that the utterance of a word on his part was to lose him his wager. Time being adjusted, the chatterer became mute. Now it happened that his house was only just round the corner, and thither one of the trotters had already crept, telling his wife that she had

better come to the inn immediately, for that her husband seemed to have fallen into a fit, being quite speechless. She hastened to the room, calling on him to speak to her. He motioned her to silence, placing his hands knowingly on his lips, and literally looking "unutterable things." She implored him to speak ; but he stamped his foot, waved to her to stand aside, shook his head, clenched his fist at her, took out his watch, pointed to the figures, knit his brows as he again looked at her most knowingly. But she, poor thing ! now became distracted ; she said she was sure he had become mad. She sank before him, clasped his knees, and screamed in the bitterness of the worst anticipations. Unable to endure this any longer, he in a kind tone cried out to her, "Od rot thee ! thou'st lost me my wager ; they're nought but trotting thee !"

The "trotting" system grew at length to be a nuisance ; it was carried too far. The tricks popularly belonging to the 1st of April, if magnified by a thousand-mischief power, would but faintly represent them. Even mock orders for goods were given to commercial travellers, and pranks played, the detail of which would fill a volume ; but retaliations were by and by contrived

against the trotters, and some punishments ensued.

“Send me a hundred and fifty coffins from your works at Birmingham ;” or, “Forward me a hundred tons of coals from Newcastle,” were jokes which sometimes issued from the lips of “substantial” men ; and the orders were executed and payment enforced. Some events of this kind had a damping effect on the humour of the trotters ; and one incident, which has frequently been named in connexion with the subject, is worthy of being recorded as a specimen of “the biter bit.”

When General Burgoyne was returning from the Preston election, at which he was a candidate, he stopped for refreshment at the inn where the trotters were, as usual, regaling in the bar, while he and his friends left the carriage at the door and went up-stairs. His presence becoming known, one of the trotters, “one of the adverse party” in politics, determined to play off a little smartness on the general, whose intellect he chose to undervalue. He accordingly handed his watch (a handsome gold watch) to the waiter, ordering him to shew it to the general, and ask him if he could tell what time of day it was, for the information of a gentleman below, but forbidding him to give

his name. The waiter executed his not very agreeable mission, and in answer to inquiries from the insulted party, admitted that the owner of the watch was one of the company in the bar. "Fetch my pistols," said the general to his valet, who hastened to the travelling-case and brought them up on a tray. The general took the tray in his hand, placed the watch between the pistols, and stepping down to the bar, asked each individual there the important question whether that watch was *his*. In every instance "No" was the reply. "Then," said the general, "it is mine—at all events till it is claimed; and when its owner wants it he will apply for it—in his own name, of course!" He pocketed the watch, and it is believed it is in the family to this day.

It is but fair to state that this story is also told of a Captain Bligh, who was thus treated on a journey in Yorkshire; but I give it as I received it, and it is of a quality well becoming the character of Bolton trotting.

But although "trotting" has passed away, there is still a good deal of humour somewhat similar prevailing in Lancashire.

A friend of mine riding over from Rochdale to see the celebrated "Whitworth Doctors," pulled

up at a roadside alehouse to ask his way, when a man loitering about the door accosted him,—

“Foine day, sir!”

“Yes, it is very pleasant, indeed,” was the reply.

“But it ’ll not be long so,” continued the man.

“Why not?” asked my friend, looking anxiously up and around. “I see no prospect of rain, or of more than a few flying drops at the worst.”

“I tell thee it ’ll be wet to th’ skin afore foive minutes are o’er.”

“Nonsense!”

“But I’ll bet thee a quart on’t.”

This offer so amused the inquirer that, to indulge the man’s whim, he said “Done!” and consented to wait five minutes. In much less time, however, a few mere drops began to patter among the leaves and to spot the dust. The man turned up his sleeve, and catching a drop on the back of his hand, exclaimed,—

“I told thee so, mon. See thee, it’s wet to th’ skin awready!”

My friend laughed, and willingly paid the eightpence for the lesson he had received on the necessity of clear definitions.

During the assizes at Lancaster, some years

ago, Mr. A——, an elderly Liverpool gentleman, a very Falstaff in person, bet a wager with a young, active fellow, who was to him as a greyhound to an elephant, that he would run him a foot-race of sixty or eighty yards (I forget the length), the youngest giving the senior five yards of a start, and agreeing not to touch him on the way. The place selected by the burly gentleman was a long and very narrow entry, the first step into which, on his part, settled the question, to the great merriment of the by-standers.

Specification of terms, or the absence of them, or an unexpected use of them, have frequently given rise to remarks which seem to range themselves under the head of English humour.

On board a gaily crowded steam-vessel, one day, every thing was in the most comfortable condition for enjoyment, except that one of the passengers was studying self rather too exclusively, by indulging in a cigar on the quarterdeck amidst the *élite* of the company. The steward, having his attention drawn to the circumstance, politely remonstrated with the offender, and pointed to the established rule recorded on a board on the funnel,—“Gentlemen are not allowed to smoke on the quarterdeck.” “Well, sir,” said he of the

cigar, languidly, "what is that to me? I'm no gentleman, not a bit of it; so you can't make it apply to me in any way;" and he resumed his smoking till other arguments were used not quite so provocative of his humour as of his temper.

In another case, a boor of a fellow began smoking amongst other passengers, putting the question soon after he commenced, Whether it was disagreeable to any body present? Some one replied that it was. "Ay," said he, coolly continuing his enjoyment, "it is disagreeable to some people, I believe;" and he puffed away with all the placidity of a Dutchman.

A Yorkshireman played off a little humour upon a Leicestershire grazier in a manner more complimentary to his own drollery than to the honesty of his neighbours at home.

"I assure you," said the Leicestershire grazier, "in our county the land is so prime, and every thing grows so fast, that if you put a horse into a mown field for the night, in spring time, the grass will have grown so high that you will hardly be able to see him below his knees in the morning."

"Bless your heart," replied the Yorkshireman,

“ you shall put a horse into a field for a night in our county, and in the morning you shan’t be able to see him at all.”

An old rogue of a coach-proprietor, in his last illness, was visited by one of his drivers, a droll fellow, who had long been in his service, and was once a fellow-whip. Referring to their old occupation, the invalid said, ‘in a languid tone,—

“ I am going a *long* journey this time, Joe.”

“ Ay, master, it is so; but there’s one comfort: I reckon you’ll find it all down-hill.”

It was the humour of a Lancashire yeoman, of good station, but proud of his broad dialect, to express every thing in the fewest possible words. Like an algebraist, who will not set down $1x$, though he will write $2x$ or $3x$, because, as he justly says, x itself shews there is one unknown quantity to be recognised, and, therefore, we need not write $1x$; so, our friend would not waste a word, though he would not at all restrain his ideas. He was an officer of a volunteer corps, and it fell to his lot to return thanks for the gift of a pair of colours to his regiment.

The lady donor was in the balcony: the regiment was drawn up in full display: the music

ceased; the colours were glided down under the touch of the lady's hand, to the gallant officer, suitable expressions accompanying them, when the happy recipient (whose friends were anxiously listening for his oration, which they thought must be of some length *on this occasion*), addressed the fair source of this honour in this emphatic manner:—

“ Madam, we accept’n ’em wi’ gratitude; we’ll defend ’em wi’ fortitude; and if th’ French should shoot aw the silk away, we’ll bring th’ pows whoam again.”

Here is *multum in parvo*: in a few words we have a thankful acknowledgment, a declaration of bravery inspired by a precious boon, and an expression of determination that he and his comrades would so faithfully stand to their colours, even in the thickest of the battle, that if the gorgeous drapery of the banners should be torn away by showers of bullets, they would bring the bare poles home again. Nay, the very allusion to the return home indicates the readiness of even quitting the locality to which, as volunteers, they belonged, and, if needful, carrying the war into the enemy’s quarters.

I commend such brevity and true eloquence to

all young orators, and to all prozers, who, as a French writer observes, endeavour to compensate for the want of *depth* in their speeches by their liberality as to *length*; and it has been truly said, that those who have the talent of “speaking against time” rarely make speeches that will last beyond their own time.

CONCLUSION.

THE THEORY SUBMITTED TO A VERDICT.

As the lawyers say, "That is my case, my lord." I have endeavoured to sketch some of the peculiarities which characterise different portions of our fellow-subjects: to give Wit and Humour their respective positions; to separate the Wit and Blunders of all nations from the Wit and Blunders of IRELAND ALONE; to establish a theory in reference to the latter on the arguments adduced in the third and four following chapters of this work; and to describe what I conceive to be the one singular *immediate* source of all that, in these matters, is fairly ascribable to the Irish.

Of the origin of the source itself I have advanced no speculation; but a friend of mine, a gentleman of Plymouth, expresses the opinion,

that, among the humbler orders of the Irish, hunger strongly excites their wit. He says he is frequently appealed to by persons in distress, and he finds more brilliance of mind, more readiness alike for touching pathos and witty cajolery (both of them, perhaps, resorted to at the same interview), on the part of those who are half famished, than of others in better case. He states, moreover, that he finds greater wit among the poor than among the more fortunate classes of the Irish nation.

If his experience agrees with the actual fact, it is not unlikely that the progress of temperance, which is sure to augment the solid food and bodily comforts of the people, may also cause a perceptible decline in their mental acuteness, it being an old adage that "beef is an enemy to wit;" and truly the poor of Ireland may afford to undergo a considerable change in this respect. They had better have what an East Londoner would call "wittles" than wit, though I should prefer their possessing both, in wholesome abundance.

Some persons, again, are disposed to think that the wit will disappear with the whisky, the use of which is said to be so perceptibly on the

decline. Should this be the case, it will be fortunate that I have, just in season, made a record of it as it stands; but I have no fear myself that Erin will lose her diadem of brilliants, or become cold-hearted, or in any way less justly admired than she is for habitual intellectual liveliness; and I trust that not a word has escaped my pen which will have any other effect than increasing the kindly feeling of my own countrymen towards her.

Here, then, I consign my theory to the public. It was "approved and confirmed" after the full discussion alluded to in the Dedication, but it must now be dealt with by others. If it be sound, let it be adopted: if not, let it be annihilated by all means. For, after all, my little book may still remain as a source of unobjectionable amusement, if only for the sake of the undoubted "diamonds" which I have had the pleasure of stringing together.

Indeed, I trust the diamonds will be more justly appreciated and more easily remembered whenever they are required to enliven conversation, owing to one particular at which I have aimed, and which I regard as important in all things — that is, CLASSIFICATION, the value of

which was well illustrated by a clergyman, whose name, I regret, has escaped my memory. A lady was complimenting him on the fact that she could always recollect and recite more of the matter of *his* sermons than of those of any other minister she was in the habit of hearing. She could not account for this ; but she thought the fact worthy of observation. The reverend gentleman remarked, that he thought he could explain the cause. "I happen," he said, "to make a particular point of classifying my topics—it is a hobby of mine to do so ; and, therefore, I never compose a sermon without first settling the relationship and order of my arguments and illustrations. Suppose, madam, that your servant was starting for town, and you were obliged hastily to instruct her about a few domestic purchases, not having time to write down the items ; and suppose you said, 'Be sure to bring some tea, and also some soap, and coffee too, by the by ; and some powder-blue ; and don't forget a few light-cakes, and a little starch, and some sugar ; and, now I think of it, some soda ;' you would not be surprised if her memory failed with regard to one or two of the articles. But if your commission ran thus, 'Now, Mary, to-morrow we are going

to have friends to tea, therefore bring a supply of tea, and coffee, and sugar, and light-cakes; and the next day, you know, is washing-day, so that we shall want soap, and starch, and soda, and powder-blue,' it is most likely she would retain your order as easily as you retain my sermons."

I now close this little recreation. If it add some rosy smiles to the light of a winter fireside, my pleasant occupation of leisure moments, "few and far between," will not have been in vain."

THE END.

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